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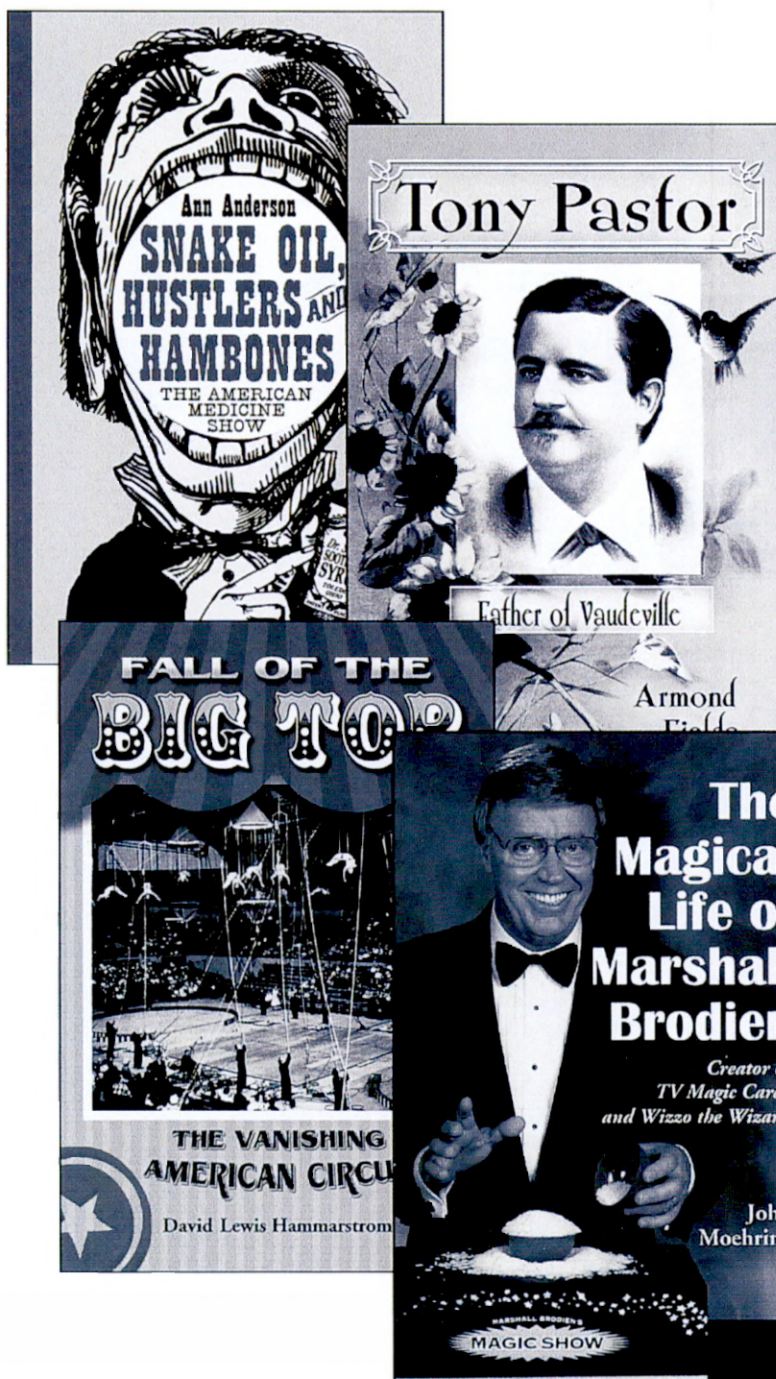


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# "The Greatest Place on Earth" An Assessment of Circus World

BY DON STACEY

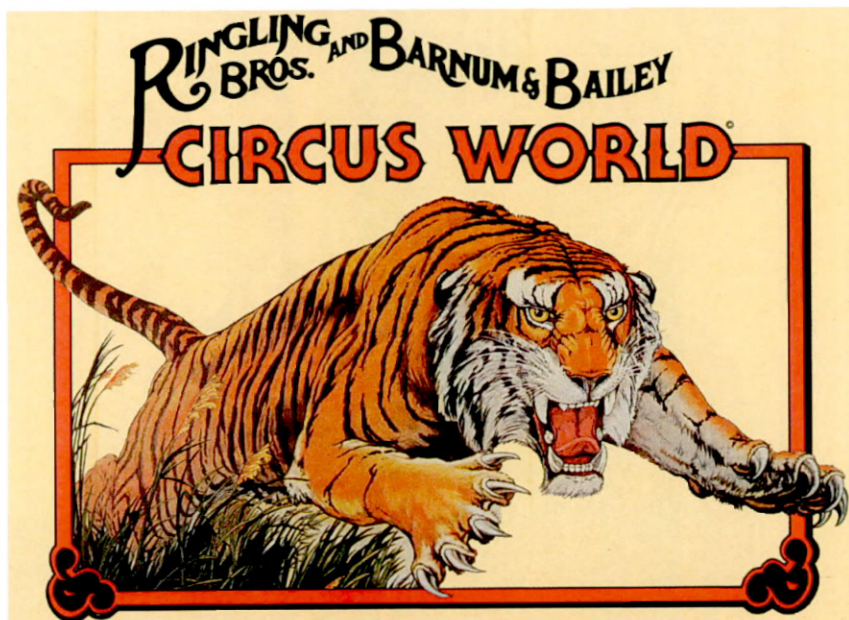
Reprinted from *KING POLE* No. 162 March-April 2007.

One of America's leading circus critics and historians, David Lewis Hammarstrom, left nobody in any doubt of his dislike for Irvin Feld, the man who headed the conglomerate which bought "The Greatest Show on Earth" from John Ringling North in 1967. His book *Behind the Big Top* is testimony to this, while his admiration for North and his family shines forth, giving little credence to the oft-mooted belief that Feld was the savior of the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus. I cannot claim to have seen the Ringling show in America under John Ringling North's guidance, but was closely involved in the running of the disastrous European tour of 1963/64. Having seen numerous Feld productions of "The Greatest Show on Earth" since 1971, I am inclined to agree with those who feel that Feld and his family were, indeed, the people who saved this oldest and biggest of all traveling circuses from annihilation.

## "BIGGEST PRODUCER OF LIVE ENTERTAINMENT"

But like any businessman in history, Irvin Feld was not without his failures in business, and the same can be said of his son Kenneth Feld who has continued to run Feld Entertainment with its circus units, ice shows, stage shows and other entertainment interests. Whilst the various units of Disney on Ice have been enormously successful worldwide, other ice show ventures have proved less popular or even loss makers.

In 2006, Feld celebrated 25 years of Disney on Ice shows, with six units around the globe. But recent



The front cover of a 1979 booklet about Circus World. Author's collection.



ice shows like "Anastasia on Ice," "The Wizard of Oz on Ice," "Grease on Ice," and some ventures like *MADhattan!* at the New York New York Hotel in Las Vegas were less than successful. Barnum's Kaleidoscope, the Ringling one ring tented venture was an artistic success but last with the Broadway and West End musical "Barnum" was a triumph and is ongoing, the stage show

Cover of a Showcase brochure. Author's collection.



of "Goosebumps" was not so popular in America, and was not a box-office success in Blackpool one summer. But the Feld Entertainment organization is to be congratulated for its continual attempts to diversify, to experiment and expand into other fields than simply circuses and ice shows, and is undoubtedly the biggest producer of live entertainment in the world. For a number of years its Siegfried and Roy illusion show was the toast of Las Vegas at the Mirage Hotel, and clearly a great money-spinner.

#### CIRCUS WORLD THEME PARK

Possibly the most publicized failure of Irvin Feld's management of "The Greatest Show on Earth" though was the circus theme park, Circus World, which took, not surprisingly, the title of "The Greatest Place on Earth." No comprehensive analysis of its successes and failures have, as far as I know, ever been attempted, but with the benefit of both distance and hindsight, as well as non-involvement, I will attempt to seek out at least some of the truths behind what I felt on several viewings was an exciting entertainment destination which, with the right luck, might still be operating with huge success today in the center of America's theme park industry Orlando, Florida.

The Ringling-Barnum Circus company was sold by the Felds to Mattel Inc. just before Christmas 1971 in a deal which "virtually sextuples the investment of 1967 of about 8 million dollars," according to reports. Irvin Feld remained as Circus President and it was his idea to form Circus World, backed by the Mattel Company. Mattel was soon involved in litigation against Western show operator Montie Montana for infringement of the Buffalo Bill Wild West title and service mark, held by Ringling-Barnum.

When Irvin Feld announced the idea of Circus World in February 1972, he projected staff levels of 750 to 800 people. He told *Amusement Business* journal (which closed down in the summer of 2006) that he did not think the operation would have any effect on Walt Disney World, only ten miles away. "We're not in competition with anything or anyone

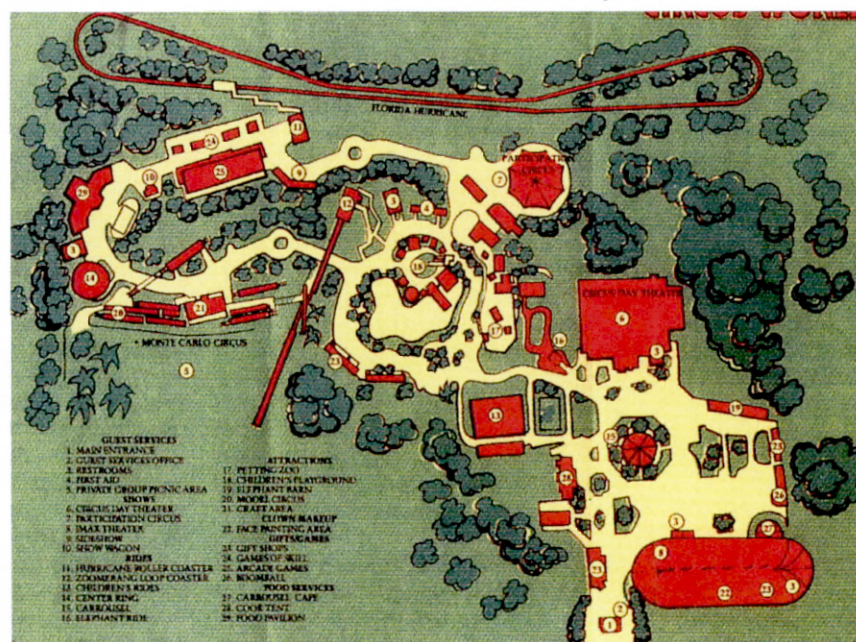


The Circus Day Theater. Author's collection.

because nothing like this has ever been attempted. If anything, what with Disney World exceeding its anticipated attendance, the projects will complement each other." He did not visualize the winter quarters being moved there because, "we can't rehearse two or three shows in a place where public exhibitions are going on."

The annual stockholders' meeting

A map of the park in 1979. Author's collection.



of Mattel in the summer of 1972 revealed the company was back in the black thanks to the acquisition of the Ringling title, and management seemed confident about the Circus World project. The following year, a \$32.4 million loss was reported and by 1974 Gulf Oil was trying to buy the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Combined Shows Inc. and the theme park site. Gulf, which failed in its talks, was keen to obtain the park as it had been active in the Florida region for some time and was developing Florida Center, a new town for vacation residents near to Walt Disney World.



Meanwhile, in the summer of 1974, the application of the Ringling-Barnum show for registration of the title "Circus World" at Haines City was being opposed by the Circus World of Baraboo, Wisconsin. Quite how this claim was finally settled I do not know, but clearly Mr Feld won out.

In another interview with *Amusement Business*, Mr. Feld claimed, "We will need roughly 4,000 fulltime employees. This will be about 3,200 non-performers, support people of all types, so it will lend greatly to the economy of Florida. In the initial stages we will spend in excess of 50 million dollars. We will never finish the park. You never finish these park projects, you keep adding and adding, all the time."

Of his dreams for Circus World, Mr. Feld expanded: "There will be thousands of opportunities. I'll be able to do for the first time things that I've dreamed of for more than five years. It has been my desire to bring back, for everyone to enjoy, all the nostalgia of the 102 years of Mingling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus. To put it all together, where it won't be simulated, but real. Things that happened back in 1870, the turn of the century, the early 1900s, giving people the thrills that entertained our parents and our grandparents, and our great-grandparents. To make the circus the great American institution it deserves to be."

Hammarstrom, in *Behind The Big Top*, wrote, "When he unveiled the plans for his ambitious Circus World complex near Orlando, Florida, I sensed Irvin Feld's greatest bid for immortality. I still find the prospect fascinating. Like the gauche, bigger-than-life program magazines which he crams with pictures and stories of himself, Feld's printed documents are impressive. One of the issues contained a bombastic preview article on Circus World, "The Greatest Place on Earth." Its construction, in close proximity to Disney World, smacked of a second-rate mind trying to cash in on another man's fortunes. Here on 750 acres of prime teal estate topped with a nineteen-story elephant, Jumbo, would be preserved forever the circus and its associate amusements-cinematic histories of the sawdust trail, carousels, and cook houses.

Replicas of big tops of the golden age. Side shows and rides, winter quarters open for public inspection, parades every day, the arrival of the grand old circus train, a theatre of illusions, even a University of Circus

in the States, and had to close them.

Undoubtedly Irvin Feld's idea to be close to the Disney park in Orlando, Florida, was a shrewd one, since his park could feed off holidaymakers visiting the area primarily to visit



A rendering of the complete park. Pfening Archives.

Arts for serious aspiring stars."

In essence it would appear to be a bolder version of the Circus World Museum in Baraboo, Wisconsin, or the Circus Hall of Fame in Sarasota, Florida, which later moved to Peru, Indiana, so why knock Feld's aspirations? Even if he did later claim it to be "the world's only circus-oriented amusement park." It was definitely the biggest, but not the first, nor the last. It was the ultimate, yet it was a flop. Why?

The name of Barnum and Bailey, coupled with that of the Ringling Brothers, has been the consistently most famous title in American circus history, and Barnum & Bailey enjoyed considerable success in Europe too, while the combined title in 1963 did not attract audiences. What Walt Disney is to children's cartoons and merchandise, Ringling is to circus. But Disney's name a worldwide product, while Ringling's is not. Disney opened a ring of merchandise shops throughout the States and then in rope with success. Ringling opened a few merchandising outlets

Disney World, a stupendous attraction, or the other established theme parks of the area, which in 1970 included Cypress Gardens, Busch Gardens in Tampa, Sea World, and not too far from popular Daytona Beach. Feld proposed to create Circus World at Haines City, only ten minutes from Walt Disney World on U.S. 27, at Interstate 4, an apparently brilliant choice of site. He even named the area Barnum City. With the unlimited appeal of the circus for "children of all ages", one might have assumed the new theme park could not fail.

#### 750 ACRES OF SEMI-TROPICAL FLORIDA

Just as the Walt Disney organization had bought up huge tracts of land in the Orlando region, the circus company bought up some 750 acres of orange grove territory in the heart of semi-tropical Florida, within just a few minutes' drive of the Walt Disney World park. It was probably just because it was so close to Disney's new found Floridian goldmine that Circus World failed to attract. It is, I believe, simply ahead of its time, too soon on the emerging scene of theme



park expansions and successes, and were it to have come along, say, 20 years later, would be a huge success in the area today, since more and more theme parks have since evolved to make the Orlando area America's theme park haven, the more Disney parks, movie-themed parks and animal parks an one can possibly cram into a week or two weeks' holiday. In opinion Irvin Feld was a brilliant man to envisage "The Greatest Place on Earth" but was simply ahead of his own time.

There was, too, another big problem for Feld. He and his assonates had sold the major shareholding in the Ringling Bros. and Barnum and Bailey empire to the Mattel toy firm, and the advent of Circus World coincided with Mattel's deepening financial problems. Therefore it is safe to assume that finances were not readily available for the growth and expansion of the park necessary for to become a serious competitor to Disney World and Epcot Centre. Irvin Feld and his son Kenneth Feld ended up buying the circus and entertainment company from Mattel in 1982, but significantly the Circus World property was not included in the sale which included the circus units as well as the Ice Follies and Holiday on Ice units.

Irvin Feld, who died in 1984, was President and Producer of the "Greatest Show on Earth," succeeding generations of Ringlings to bring the circus company to greater heights of glory and earning-power than ever during its long history. He presumably saw an even greater symbol of his own importance in the envelopment and continuation of this circus legacy in his vision of "The Living World of Ringling Bros. and Barnum and Bailey" when he first announced Circus World's projection.

There was a very elaborate Circus World Showcase brochure for "The Greatest Place on Earth," including an artist's impression of how the Jumbo 19 story structure would look. Although curious on the artist's impression of the overall layout of the theme park, I cannot spot this towering edifice, which eventually never materialized. Ground breaking took place on 26 April 1973, Feld giv-

ing it his typical showman's touch by an attendant troupe of Ringling pachyderms adorned with over-sized construction worker's helmets and the 33 inch tall midget Michu perched atop a similar helmet. Building work at that point was estimated at 50 million dollars. A year later, the Showcase section of the park opened under Feld's guidance even though Ringling-Barnum was part of the Showcase beginning over the years, until it occupied some eighty-five of the total 750 acres of land.



The entrance to Circus World. Woodcock collection.

#### PLANNING PROPOSAL FOR FELD'S "LIVING CREATION"

Irvin Feld himself obviously had a passionate enthusiasm for the need for a permanent park dedicated to highlighting the color and excitement of The Greatest Show on Earth's past, present and future. He claimed, "Every amusement center and complex is a tribute to mechanics and electronics. Of course, there will be rides, and, of course, we take a back seat to no one in structures that will delight and amaze, but Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus World will be a living creation. There is nothing like it, and we think there will never be again," Open daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., it

represented "The Great American Value" at only \$1.95 for adults, 95 cents for children, free for those under six.

I have a copy of the original planning proposal for the park. The symbol of the entertainment complex was to be the huge, bejeweled elephant, standing higher than a 16 story building, the largest structure of its kind in the world, with a bank of elevators to take visitors to various levels, and an observation 'howdah' high atop the elephant. A two-level luxury restaurant was to be included

within the structure. From both restaurant and observation tower, visitors would be able to survey the entire complex, including wild animals in their natural habitats. Twelve entertainment areas were planned. Circus Town was to be a "complete town in which will be exhibited and demonstrated the many and varied arts, skills and crafts of the circus." Centered around a covered square, visitors would be able to watch rehearsing and performing circus acts, animals and clowns, exhibitions of harness making for circus animals, a working blacksmith shop, and an exhibition of craftsmen making circus wagon sunburst wheels, as well as artisans, painters, sculptors and photographers practicing their arts as related

to the world of circus. Visitors would also enjoy demonstrations of how the circus train was unloaded in the old days, how tents were erected and the cookhouse operated, and could visit the huge shops and workrooms which construct the elaborate and expensive costumes, props and scenic effects for the Ringling-Barnum shows. Several times a day, an old-fashioned Circus Parade would depart from Circus Town Square to wind its way through a large part of the complex, with old time parade wagons, band wagons, chariots and calliopes, animals and performers.

A permanent 12,000 seat big top circus tent structure would stage recreations of circus spectacles of the past, including Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show and Congress of Rough Riders (Ringling-Barnum



owning title to this and other attractions from the past), Roman riding and other spectacular productions. There would be a circus side show, with gaudy banners, spelling barkers and ticket booths, with the most popular of side show oddities, the sword-swallower, fire eater, fat lady, tattooed lady, giants and midgets. Circus performers would teach their arts and skills in the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey University of Circus Arts, the aim being to develop new and great circus acts from the United States of America. The Ringling Clown College would also be in permanent session as part of the University's program. "On campus" dormitories and living facilities would be provided for students.

The circus midway section would have about 15 new and astonishing circus-orientated rides for the family, a circus fun house and puppet shows, as well as motion picture showings of acts by all time great circus performers. The house of magic would feature the world's greatest illusionists.

The planned animals at home section would have authentic natural environments for wild animals, lions, tigers, elephants, leopards, and other jungle animals. Jim Fowler, the zoologist who was for nine years co-host of NBC television's "Wild Kingdom," had been commissioned to design this attraction. In a meet the animals section the public could pet animals and take rides on elephants, camels, llamas and other animals. A backstage with the animals section was where one could see the animals at home and see how they were cared for, with a complete animal medical center and nursery.

The world's largest circus Museum would display circus memorabilia from old-time parade wagons, calliopes, circus billboards, rare and antique posters and panoramic displays of the history of the Ringling show. The circus coliseum would be a mammoth outdoor stadium where the world's most renowned daredevils would present a thrill circus, chariot racing and an aqua circus with a gigantic fireworks display a nightly feature. A replica of the Ringling Circus train would run through the complex as well as a circus monorail, and visi-

tors could ride more leisurely in carriages and wagons, drawn by llamas, camels, horses, ponies and elephants. Additionally there'd be seven complete family restaurants, decorated in circus motifs dozens of snack bars, refreshment stands, water fountains, and restrooms. The 400 room Ringling Hotel would be a completely new concept in family vacation living, each guest room decorated in "dazzling circus motif, down to the last detail" and a real carousel operating in the lobby. Complete modern television and motion picture studio facilities would be constructed within the complex, and Irvin Feld would be President of the whole "Living World of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey."

The proposal sounded to me perfectly acceptable and exciting for a theme park complex to sit alongside or even rival Sea World, Busch Gardens and Walt Disney World and no doubt has it all come to fruition, possibly at a far later date than the early 1970s. I have no doubt it could have been a huge success. Since the Ringling show had moved its winter quarters out of Sarasota. Its winter

Barbara Woodcock at Circus World. Woodcock collection.



home was Venice, Florida, and I guess it would have been logical eventually to have utilized part of the huge complex as a working winter quarters for the show, but this never transpired. Today, there is still talk of moving the winter home from Tampa fairgrounds where it transitionally goes.

#### OPENING OF CIRCUS WORLD IN 1974

The opening of the preview showcase center took place on 21 February 1974 and apparently the new theme park opened officially on 3 April 1976. It was said that visitors would be entertained for four or five hours at the park. In *Two Hundred Years of the American Circus*, Tom Ogden claimed the project had cost 100 million dollars, and said of it: "Mattel Toys, the major shareholder in the Ringling show and Circus World, was already burdened with 20 million dollars in circus debts.

Panicked when the park's opening weeks brought only 300 to 400 visitors a day, Mattel ordered a 3 million dollar make-over. When the park reopened, Michael Downs,—a former Opryland executive, had been brought in to replace Irvin Feld as director.

Despite an enormous publicity campaign, Circus World never drew Florida tourists away from the main attractions already in the Orlando area; it closed within a few months at a tremendous monetary loss." Ogden's final statement is untrue since Circus World lasted a few years. In truth, the park was temporarily shut down and renovation undertaken as a last-ditch effort to save the costly venture. According to Hammarstrom, "The parent company rescinded Feld's authority in the venture and substituted Michael Downs, a former Opryland executive, along with other theme park experts. Circus World was reopened in augmented format with a live stage show to growing public response. Subsequent Mattel reported to its stockholders that the company will realize its investments in Circus Park assets and the adjacent land or that, after additional capital investment, if any, Circus Park will operate successfully.



## FROM 1977: MY OWN VISITS TO CIRCUS WORLD

Personally, I have nothing but delightful memories of "The Greatest Place on Earth." Brenda Stevens was Director of Publicity when I visited, and she and her assistant Barbara Adams were welcoming hostesses to the park and its attractions on each occasion, before Brenda moved to another theme park, and was replaced by Larry Bucking of Orlando, who had worked for five years with the *Sentinel Star*, Central Florida's major daily paper. In September 1977, Brenda explained to me the situation regarding Circus World and the Felds, stating that "Circus World is no longer under the jurisdiction of the Ringling Combined Shows and the Felds. We are our own subsidiary of Mattel Inc., as are the traveling shows, and we therefore act as two independent companies. William E. Ketchum is the President of Circus World. We do, however, jointly pool efforts and talents with the Combined Shows in the production and staging of the Big Show, "The Day the Circus Comes to Town."

While it failed to live up to the fantastic picture envisaged by Irvin Feld initially, Circus World offered a most enjoyable day out and collectors of circus memorabilia had a field day - never was more merchandise marketed for any circus themed attraction.

One year there was a huge circus parade staged throughout the park, and the Coronas, originally from Czechoslovakia, performed their aerial motor cycle act high over the heads of the public. In the James A. Bailey Theatre, an extravaganza of magic and illusions was presented by Mark Wilson and others who followed him, in a 25 minutes' display performed six times daily.

"Circus in America" was the title of the film which lasted half an hour, shown eight times a day and presented on the huge IMAX cinema screen, over six stories high, said to be the largest in the world. It was indeed a unique journey in sight and sound, in which the viewer was pitched right into the action with the circus stars. There was a breathtaking and stomach-churning opening roller-coaster ride, the experience of being

on the aerial motorcycle with Elvin Bale, on the flying trapeze with Tito Gaona, in the big cage with Gunther Gebel Williams' tigers or with Charly Baumann's tigers, or with Pablo Noel's fierce lions. You joined Pio Nock or the Penchevi Troupe on the highwire, the Varardis Troupe on the springboard, Billy and Tommy Baker with the liberty horses, entered Clown Alley and joined in the sticky fun of a birthday cake party, with chimpanzee Sally and trainers Sue and Rudi Lenz. This was truly a cinematic experience not to be forgotten, and one in which you appeared to participate. You really did participate in the Participation Circus, with a grandstand for the public to watch the open-air display by circus experts on the flying trapeze, vaulting horse, high and low wires, trampoline and in juggling. Half hour displays were given three times a day and trainers included Victor Gaona, father of the triple-somersaulter Tito, and Tito's younger brother Ricki, as well as other famous artistes. Victor Gaona was head trainer. After the experts demonstrated their skills, members of the audience were invited to join in the fun, all in perfect safety, with safety harnesses worn by all volunteers.



A rendering of the theater where "The Day the Circus Comes to Town" was presented. Pfening Archives.

The huge theater which housed the spectacular circus musical presentation, "The Day the Circus Comes to Town" was always full to capacity when I was there, playing twice daily. Billed as "the world's largest circus musical presented in the country's most unusual theater," singers, dancers, and musicians combined with top line circus artistes in a truly beautiful show, created and pro-

duced by an outstanding Broadway and Hollywood talent, Paul Crabtree. It conjured up the excitement and wonder in the golden age of the American traveling circus, when the show came to town, the artistes arriving in a replica of the circus train, and following this was a grand parade with a dozen mixed dancers led by the handsome singing ringmaster Keith Truesdall. A brown bear ct worked alfresco and then a steel arena cage was erected in the single ring, and in which bearded American trainer Jewell New presented his excellent group of 15 male lions, one of which joined the Texan for a motorcycle ride round the cage. Jewell New was featured with the Ringling Blue touring unit in 1978 and 1979, returning to Circus World for 1980. His group of lions were later sold, in 1982, to Circo Suarez in Mexico. Bill "Buckles" Woodcock, one of the world's foremost elephant trainers, showed a group of five large Asiatic elephants, a novelty act with two elephants in a barber shop routine and with his wife, Barbara, had another novel act with an elephant and a leopard, the latter leaping into Bill's arms from the side of a recumbent elephant. There were a number of young clowns, six graduates of the

Clown College, two of whom, Linda Kay Lambert and Wayne Paul Sidley, were married in the first clown wedding ceremony in the Circus Theater of Circus World. Thrill acts were provided by George Coronas from Czechoslovakia, a fourth generation performer, on the huge gyro wheel, and the foursome known as the Flying Lanes, flying trapeze act of quality, graduates of the Florida State University. Col. E. Trevor Bale was there working liberty horses but I failed to see him work as each act had a day off each week, since the



park was open seven days a week, every day of the year.

The following year (1978), Buckles Woodcock was due to join the Ringling Blue unit, and was replaced by Axel Gautier and his group of Ringling elephants. "The Day The Circus Comes to Town" had plenty of spectacle, color and lavish costuming, and ended with a fanciful finale parade. Although it lasted only 55 minutes without intermission, it was a superb production which would have done well in any European park.

By the time I went to Circus World for the second time, the Side Show had been added, with six daily performances by midway performers, a barker, and a large games area. In the Menagerie animal lovers could see giraffes, camels and llamas. On 17 June 1979, giraffe Aggie gave birth to a 5 feet tall, 140 pounds daughter Soudana. In the Petting Zoo, visitors could mingle with and feed goats, deer, llamas, sheep and tortoises.

There was a popular elephant ride, with special howdahs to carry children and adults throughout the park and there were an abundance of strolling clowns and jugglers. The Circus Carousel was a popular ride with young and old, and for young children there was a Clown-a-Lot, where youngsters under 12 had the run of the place, with The Clown Bound. Slide-for-Life and Big Top Net Climb, just some of the attractions connected by a labyrinth of elevated walkways, ramps and ladders, constructed both for safety and fun. "The General Tom Thumb Circus" was a supervised play area with riders and attractions designed specially for the tiny tots. The cook tent, the Food Pavilion and the Carousel Cafe carried popular foods and drinks, and had graduated to serving beer to adults, where formerly only soft drinks were available. Each afternoon there was a "Parade of the Clowns" through the park with visitors in clown makeup, joining the parade of the professionals, and being awarded a "Certificate of Appreciation" afterwards. Several old Ringling Bros. and

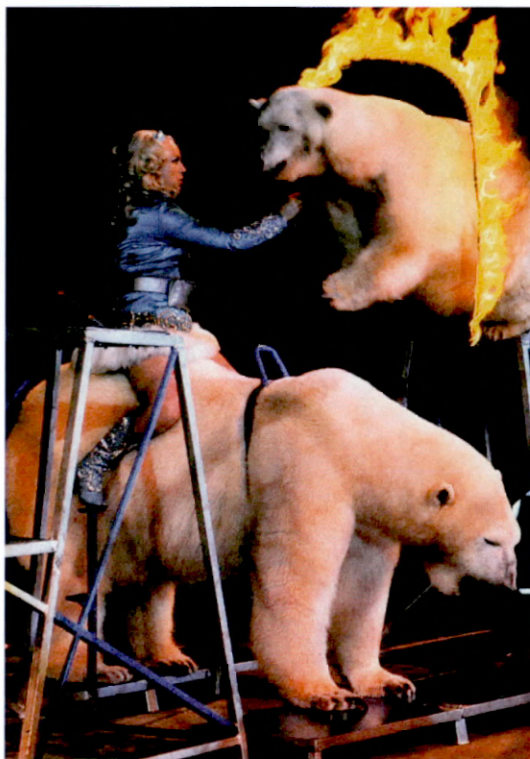


The large group of elephants at Circus World. Woodcock collection.

Barnum & Bailey Circus railroad cars were installed at Circus World by now, one of them housing the scary Gargantua exhibit. Gargantua had been Ringling's most publicised circus attraction of the 20th century, and was exhibited with a preserved figure of M'Toto, Gargantua's mate. Other railroad cars housed displays of time circus costumes, historical props and memorabilia.

After seven years of bitter wran-

Ursula Bottcher's polar bears at Circus World. Pfening Archives.



gling and negotiation, and legal action, the Ringling management regained seven old circus wagons from the Ringling Museum, in Sarasota. The circus claimed ownership of the wagons of the wagons 20 years or more earlier after museum officials had rescued them from being destroyed when the circus moved to its winter home from Sarasota to Venice. The museum staff had restored them to their former glory. The agreement between the museum and circus allowed the Ringling Museum to retain eight of the old wagons, among them the famous Five Graces bandwagon, built in 1878, but the circus took possession of nine vehicles it aimed to house at Circus World Park.

This time when I saw the Circus Comes to Town presentation, I found that the elaborate circus-musical with a story line had been abandoned in favor of a simpler circus presentation with an hour of entertainment. It had six dancers, ten clowns, a parade which culminated in a grand mount by ten large elephants (this had been performed by 19 the first time I saw the show.)

That year Ursula Bottcher's fabulous polar bear act had been at Circus World (it toured with the Ringling show in 1976 and 1977, 1980 and 1981) and a specially-constructed pool allowed the bears to enjoy themselves in the Florida sun between performances. Jewell New had returned to the park with his 15 lions, and the 2,500 spectators in the arena were able that year to enjoy the Stephenson's dog act from Ireland. A four girl aerial rope



ballet, six chestnut Arabian liberty horses presented by Billy or Tommy Baker, the Morgan Ashton Family, Australian risley act, the Latin-American troupe of high wire walkers, the Montalvo Troupe, with a moving seven man pyramid made famous by the Great Wallenda family. The show's clown alley presented a Keystone Kops comic entnee, and Franz Tisch, coming from the San Diego Zoo, presented five of Ringling's elephants, the show ending with a finale production and a grand mount performed by seventeen elephants. On occasion "Amico" and Franz Tisch also contributed an elephant springboard act, which was presented for the first time after only three days' rehearsals.

Tommy Robins and his Flying Robins succeeded Victor Gaona's flyers in the Participation Theater, coming in from early training in the Sarasota Sailor Circus.

Ringling's celebrated singing ringmaster Harold Ronk did a spell at Circus World, training aspiring young ringmasters in his style, including Keith Truesdell and Norm Riggins, and making the famous Kirby Grant of the TV program "Sky King" an honorary ringmaster for a day.

Many other famed circus artistes worked at Circus World. In 1981 for instance, in addition to the Stephensons and New's lions, there were aerialiste Janna, the low wire act of Dino and Anita, and the Flying Robins. Elvin Bale also performed there that year.

In 1981 the old wooden rollercoaster was renamed the Roaring Tiger, taking on a bright new look, with a roaring tiger logo on the front car, orange and black stripes on the sides of each car.

As the park developed, the management created an Elephant Barn, housing 19 elephants in a climate controlled barn of huge dimensions,



Colorful letterhead used by Circus World. Pfening Archives.

and an elephant picket line where many of the animals were tethered between shows, while next to the barn was an exercise and practice training area for the circus animals. A traditional horse stable was constructed for the display of the park's 20 or so equines, including the performing animals from the liberty act. The elephant barn, incidentally was the size of a football field, 200 feet, and had overhead showers for the pachyderms.

#### 1979: MONTE CARLO CIRCUS AT CIRCUS WORLD

In 1979, until September 3, the Circus World park had a second major circus program in addition to "The Circus Comes to Town," this being the Festival International du Cirque de Monte Carlo Spectacular. Under the high patronage of Prince Rainier. Irvin and Kenneth Feld presented this show on tour in Australia, Japan and America but I believe that its success was only marginal. Barbara Adams informed me that the Circus World publicity team received word of its arrival there at very short notice, hearing only one and half weeks in advance. It was showcased in a special circus tent as an additional attraction to the regular shows at the park.

Utilized on this tour were featured acts from the previous five Monte Carlo festivals, including the Richters' riding and elephant acts; Luis Munoz, low wire act; the high wire act of Gene Mendez; the Dobritch perch pole act; Fawcett's chimps; Karoly Donnert's tigers; Elvin Bale's thrill acts; Eotvos clowns; the Silaghis springboard act; the Weegets and Albarracines; the

Eotvos Russian Bar acrobatics; with the addition or substitution of Charly Baumann's tigers, Flying Gaonas, Farells' highwire act and the Cannestrellis at some point in the tour. I am not sure which of these acts actually appeared at Circus World,

but clearly any circus fan visiting the park that year had a bonanza with two major circus presentations. The French ringmaster Sergio officiated for the entire tour, by the end of which his mastery of English was assured.

#### 1982: MATTEL SELLS THE CIRCUSES TO THE FELTS

Mattel, in 1982, seeking to rid itself of some of its debts, sold the two Circus units, and the two Ice Show units, Holiday on Ice and Ice Follies, to Irvin Feld and Kenneth Feld. Mattel had owned the circuses for eleven years, having purchased them from the Felds and Judge Roy Hofheinz in 1971. But noticeably absent from the Felds' acquisition was the Circus World theme park, which Mattel tried to continue to operate. After selling the circuses to Mattel, the Felds had shrewdly retained the merchandising rights, and now they bought back a company for a reported 22.8 million dollars which included over 1,200 performers and employees, 500 circus animals and 98 railroad cars.

Mattel had previously come close to selling both the circuses and the Circus World park in 1974 to Gulf Oil Corporation, but negotiations had broken off abruptly. At the time of the Felds buying back the shows, Kenneth Feld said that Circus World was excluded from the sale because he and his father Irvin did not have any experience operating a theme park. More likely they were doomed. In 1983, at a time when a loss of 19.5 million dollars was reported for the previous year, the theme park was revalued at 16 million dollars. Attendances were said to have dropped from a million in 1981 to 887,442 in 1983.



#### 1984 - CIRCUS WORLD IS SOLD TO J. G. MONAGHAN

For some time, Mattel had been actively encouraging a take over bid, and finally it was sold in 1984 when on 25 May James G. Monaghan became sole owner and president of Circus World Inc., purchasing a reported 847 acres of land including the unique theme park. He was president of Gerrard Holdings Inc. of Phoenix, Arizona, and came into the theme park business from a background in real estate investment and sales, and was a partner in a nightclub and restaurant, Pompeii, at Palm Springs, California. He was born in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada and was a car dealer before becoming involved in real estate. Gerrard Holdings Inc. was in 1984 involved in three major real estate ventures. One was in Phoenix, a 1000 acres retirement community. Another was a Phoenix development of the Mercado del Rancho Shopping Centre, a 20 million dollar development, and two office buildings there valued at 10 million, with a third venture in Austin, Texas, with two tracts of land covering over 2,500 residential lots.

Monaghan's stated aim was to expand the Circus World park to include at least nine major new rides, a new hotel, a recreational vehicle park, and a residential community for retired folk on the 220 acres of land adjacent to the park, hitherto undeveloped. He said: "I believe you have to give people today a variety of entertainment... we're going to offer a lot of variety and get away from being totally a circus." After the sale of the Ringling title back to the Felds in 1982, Circus World had to change all of its publicity material and its merchandising, all its huge stocks of concession items, since the Ringling Bros. and Barnum and Bailey Circus title, and that of "The Greatest Place on Earth" could no longer be used. Whilst associated, there was no doubt that the Ringling name gave credence and prestige to the park's activities right from the start, and without this title the park had a less colourful overall presentation theme. Maybe a park devoted entirely to the theme of Circus was too limiting in its scope, but at least with the Ringling name it

always stood a chance of becoming successful. Certainly the downward spiral in the failure of of Circus World in the following years can be attributed in part to losing that name, as well as a general recession in Floridian tourism which hit many of the bigger theme parks in the Orlando area. The opening of the Epcot Center by the Walt Disney organization, which continues to dominate the area with Walt Disney World and subsequent parks, would also be a contributory factor.



The loop the loop roller coaster at Circus World. Pfening Archives.

I visited the park in the years only when it was boasting its "Greatest Place on Earth" title and did not see it under Monaghan's management. After buying the property, Monaghan purchased the nine new rides in a business trip to Europe, seven of them built in West Germany, one in Holland and one in Italy.

Over 9 million dollars were spent on them, and they included the Weiner Looping, the Himalaya Bahn, Music Express and The Slide.

#### 1985: MONAGHAN AUCTIONS CIRCUS WORLD'S ARTEFACTS

On 16 and 17 February, a huge auction was held by Guernsey's of New York of the Circus World Collection of important circus artifacts and carousel carvings, presumably in part to finance the changes Mr. Monaghan was making to the

park. Sadly this led to the dispersal of the very fine collection which had belonged to the Ringling Circus World.

The 1985 auction denuded the park of many of its finest display items, historical pieces which the new owner found no time or place for, presumably, in a park proclaiming "Let Circus World fill your days with Rides, Shows and Fun!" It might be admitted that youngsters visiting the park would be more interested in the rides and similar

attractions than in historical memorabilia painstakingly collected, but the sale of the park of much of its charm, not the least the exceptionally fine carousel, considered one of the best restored works of the master carver Marcus Charles Illions, might be regarded as sacrilegious by most circus lovers. The carousel comprised 48 individually carved wooden horses, two handsome chariots and elaborately adorned rounding boards featuring ornately framed mirrors and three dimensional cherubs. Built about 1921, it was found at the Bertrand Island Amusement Park in Lake Hopatcong, New Jersey, and took two years to restore. In the sale, its value

was estimated at \$500,000 to \$600,000. Also in the sale were many fine examples of fairground carousel horses and other animals, calliopes, full-sized wagons and floats, as used by circuses in days gone by, arcade games and slot machines, and a priceless collection of dioramas, models, books, photos, programs, posters and other circus ephemera. It also included the priceless stuffed and mounted body of Gargantua II, the 600 pound gorilla star of the Ringling show from 1938 to 1949, which had taken its place, displayed in a train car, at the park in August 1977. I remember how terrifying Gargantua's scarred and twisted face was at close range when I saw him there the first time! So all this historical material was sold off in the cause of "More Rides! More Shows! More Fun!" Already the heart of the circus theme had been destroyed.

Under Monaghan, the Circus World park was still rated a complete



day's outing for a family, and for one low price of admission, one had access to all the rides, shows, attractions and exhibits except the popular clown makeup concession. Special group rates were offered on parties of 15 or more, and pet kennel facilities were available in the Dog and Cat Palace Car, for a nominal fee. Circus World offered a wide range of special packages including a birthday party package for youngsters of 12 and under, a Discount Club for Company Groups, a complete Night Ride, Picnic and Party program for clubs, companies and groups, Educational Programs for school groups, Scouting Programs, and an Annual Pass.

The huge Big Top-shaped red and white striped building still dominated the scene, close to the ornate entrance-way and its enormous car parking lot. The structure contained a huge cinema, Plaza Cafe, puppet theatre, souvenir shops and the clown face-painting concession. Under the Ringling banner, the IMAX cinema had featured the magnificent "Circus in America" film which was shown twelve times a day, lasting half an hour, and on the largest movie screen in Southern America, 68 x 91 feet in size, an IMAX system film and a unique cinematic experience in sight and sound in which audiences could actually feel the extreme sensations of performing on the high wire, somersaulting through air from a trapeze bar, or being surrounded by wild animals in the big cage. This was withdrawn after the Ringling connection ended, and in late October 1985 Circus World premiered its new movie attraction, "Grand Canyon, the Hidden Secrets," with absolutely no circus content. In the Be-A-Star Circus, one of the park's more popular attractions, visitors could join in the fun by participating in various circus skills including the flying trapeze, wire, trampoline, juggling and tumbling, protected by the use of safety lunges.

Originally presented as an outdoor attraction, Monaghan housed this participation circus under a smart blue and white dome. On the occasion of my last visit to Circus World, there were three major rides. The Center Ring, built in Germany, was

the latest hair-raising ride, tumbling guests head over heels in a 360 degrees circular motion. The other two were of a nature not designed for the faint-hearted. One was the Florida Hurricane, carrying passengers in 24 trains at speeds of up to a nine a minute, and said to be the fastest and most thrilling coaster in the South of America when it was first introduced in 1978.



A skywheel at Circus World. Pfening Archives.

The park's Fact Sheet described it as a "high speed, low profile dog-leg shaped 'out and back' roller coaster." Its all-wood framework was built from 500,000 board feet of select Douglas fir from the Pacific northwest, and its track was half inch steel plate laid over laminated wooden tracks, the length of which was 3,500 feet. The ride took 2.1 minutes but seemed like a lifetime when you were on it! The height of the Florida Hurricane structure reached 95 feet and its longest drop was 92 feet at a 45 degree angle. Its hourly capacity was 1,200 guests and it was designed by Don Rosser and Associates of Atlanta, Georgia. Its design safety features included cushioned-steel, lap-bar seat retainers, undertrack and sidewheels, electronic brake control system and terminal brake system. Its construction, for those who value such statistics, contained 8,800 pounds of nails, 26.4 tons of

bolts, 11,000 gallons of paint in three coats, and more than 200 workmen were involved in the project. One foolhardy young man broke the Guinness Book of Records record and set a new one on Circus World's Florida Hurricane.

When it was introduced, the Zoomcrang was described as one of the most thrilling rides to be found anywhere. Aboard a four car train, you were catapulted to a rapid descent from a 50 feet high platform, shot through a 360 degree vertical loop and ascended to another 50 feet level, then plunged backwards through the loop and returned to the starting point. More adventuresome then than now, I found it frankly terrifying!

Monaghan retained the big live attraction of the Circus Spectacular in the Old Circus Day Theater, with a variety of circus acts presented several times daily, and the Great Western Stampede wild west show, complete with trick-riding, lariat twirling cowboys and cowgirls, was added to the live attractions.

While the Jumbo landmark Feld originally visualized never materialized, there was a Jumbo at the park, a giant Ferris Wheel which took you up 16 stories high for an unforgettable ride over scenic Central Florida and the citrus groves, while the ride on the new Wiener Looping truly was a hair-raising experience, a white knuckle adventure on a high speed journey around 360 degree loops and hairpin curves. You could also get swept away on the Santa Maria Shuttle Boat, bail out on the Para Tower, go into orbit on the Ranger, or glide down a 167 foot Super Slide.

For the children, there was a scaled-down roller coaster among the eleven rides for the little ones in Kid's Korner, one of the finest kiddie ride parks in America. Monaghan also brought in a new 6,000 square foot gift shop, selling everything from designer fashions and toys to unique gifts and souvenirs, plenty of restaurants, popcorn and cotton candy stands, a petting zoo, video arcade and busking fire eaters, acrobats and side show attractions.



### 1986 CIRCUS WORLD CLOSES

But the innovations and new rides introduced by Jim Monaghan did not help turn the tide for Circus World which never seemed to get off its spiral spin downwards. On 13 May 1986, fifteen years after it's beginning, Circus World was closed, with no notice given to employees or season ticket holders. 358 employees were made redundant and it was reported the park had been sold to the Orlando-based publishing firm of Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich for around 18 million dollars.

It was stated that after a 7 million dollars refurbishment, the park would reopen in December 1986, with a totally new name and concept, "Boardwalk and Baseball." The park would have a 1920s and 30s "All American" flavor, and visitors expected to see professional baseball played there. Several major league clubs were seeking new spring training sites at that time and the Circus World theme would be replaced by three baseball fields on adjacent land not yet developed in the 847 acres. Thrill rides were to be retained, with more added in due course. It was at that time stated that Monaghan paid 10 million dollars cash for Circus World. Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, gave the Arizona-based developer 181,437 shares of its stock, which closed during the sale at 93.50 dollars per share. None of the circus personnel were kept on, and employees were encouraged to apply for jobs at Sea World and Cypress Gardens, two other theme parks in the area owned by Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich at that time.

This latest sale of the park marked the end of Circus World, and of the era in which Irvin Feld had conceived the circus theme attraction. It had existed for most of the time as a corporate division of Mattel Inc., but never succeeded in fulfilling the aim of becoming a major central Florida tourist attraction despite millions of dollars being poured into it by Mattel over 13 years. At this time, many tourist officials had blamed its relatively isolated location, 30 miles southwest of Orlando, for its poor results.

Under the "Boardwalk and Baseball" title, the park continued to

be unprofitable, however, and its performance deteriorated in 1989. The mighty Anheuser-Busch Company, through its Busch Entertainment



The side show at Circus World. Pfening Archives.

Corporation arm, bought the park. This company already owned the wonderful Busch Gardens park in Tampa, Florida, and a number of other highly successful parks throughout America (including today the great Sea World themed parks), but within two months of ownership concluded that a deterioration in profitability was likely, and that further capital investment was not justified. About 876 employees were laid off, but some of them received consideration for employment within the other Busch parks in Florida. Busch Entertainment Corporation continued to operate Boardwalk and Baseball's baseball complex, which included two stadiums and four practice fields used by the Kansas City Royals for training, and by other teams. Long term use for the entire complex development were to be considered after the closure.

At that time it was stated that 135 acres were dedicated to the park and baseball facility, and an additional parcel of land, 250 acres, adjacent to the park. It would be right to assume that, by this stage in the history of the park, the extensive land had become a valuable piece of real-

estate, in the heart of one of Florida's most desirable areas.

In 1990, the Boardwalk and Baseball park closed, and the Kansas City Royals team moved its spring training to Arizona. In 2001, a Miami Beach financier, Victor Posner, who died in 2002, purchased the property for 13 million dollars from Busch Entertainment Corporation. In October 2003, ground breaking took place for Posner Park, a 500 million dollar mixed use development of homes and commercial space, Polk County commissioners having approved this scheme's plans in April 2003.

Thus ended the story of a theme park which failed to live up to its promises as "The Greatest Place on Earth." Seeing the way that new theme parks have evolved in the Orlando greater area since

Circus World was introduced, attracting more and more tourists to the area, I really feel that Irvin Feld's vision was before its time. It was, perhaps, never going to measure up to the weightier attractions of Disney World, Busch Gardens, Sea World, Disney's Wild Animal Kingdom, Universal Studios, etc., but like Cypress Gardens might well have maintained a position alongside them. After all, the attraction of circus to children of all ages has been around for nearly 250 years, far longer than the magic of Walt Disney.

### IRVIN FELD'S VISION "AHEAD OF ITS TIME"

A visit to "The Greatest Place on Earth" in Orlando was almost guaranteed to have "Cotton Candy Clouds and Stupendous Sunshine", and I have nothing but happy memories of my trips there. Circus director Floyd King declared it "a complete flop" for Irvin Feld. He considered Haines City to be "the worst location in the world. They thought they'd get an overflow from Disney World. Instead of that, Disney got all their business." That's as may be but I like to continue to believe that Irvin Feld was a man of vision in the theme park world but that he was simply 20 or 30 years ahead of his time.



# Norma Davenport Cristiani Born into "Society" For Trouping Career

By Lane Talburt

## PART ONE

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Watching circus hands return from raids on neighboring chicken coops--"stealing to survive"...

Sharing the warmth of an indoor coal-burning stove with an uncaged fighting lion...

Being chased down village streets by children who called her "gypsy"...

Those are but a few of the early memories of a precocious girl growing up on the Society Circus during the Great Depression.

Nowadays, 77-year-old Norma Davenport Cristiani can laugh as she regales friends with stories of her rearing in the hard-scrabble decade of the 1930s.

She also endures the not-too-diplomatic inquiries of circus fans about the stealthy activities of her dad—Ben Davenport, who ran the notorious grift show, Dailey Bros. Circus, in the 1940s.

Fewer questions arise about Norma's mother, Eva, better known as Princess Iola on the medicine show circuit during the Roaring Twenties and the Terrible Thirties. In fact, Eva Davenport provided most of the emotional and financial stability within the family, even as she pursued a decidedly Bohemian lifestyle.

Though she remained close to her parents throughout their lifetimes, Norma carved out her own record of achievements. During her own six-decade show-business career, she mastered at least 22 different routines in and above the ring, highlighted by her featured billing as the "world's youngest elephant trainer."

She also helped husband Pete Cristiani operate two circuses, and booked shows for circus legends D. R. Miller, Hoxie Tucker, Allan Hill and Jim Nordmark.

Weeks after attending a ceremony in 2007 where she and her late parents



Dailey Bros. Circus poster featuring Norma Davenport. Pfening Archives.

The Society Circus living trailer where Norma was born. Norma Cristiani collection.



were enshrined in the Ring of Fame, Norma admitted to the author that she was still very emotional about it. Only belatedly, she felt, were her parents receiving their due recognition from the Sarasota circus community. In 1993 the Circus Hall of Fame in Peru, Indiana, honored Ben Davenport in the management category.

The controversial aspects of his career have long overshadowed Davenport's achievements. In their book, *The Circus in America*, historians Charles Phillip Fox and Tom Parkinson referred to Dailey Bros. as the last of the rowdy racket outfits which "thrived on trouble and was permeated with petty gamblers and thieves." Even a Davenport-friendly newspaper in 1946 described Dailey Bros. as "the most unorthodox show on the road today." The five-ring giant met its demise in 1950 after replaying the same Canadian route that had been



so successful the year before. Too many people remembered their previous losses at the hands of circus grifters, Ms. Cristiani says.

While acknowledging her parents' dependence on grift, Norma insists at the same time that "my mother and father really deserved to be honored. They did more for show business people. They never turned anybody down."

She points to a list of young people who got their first circus jobs through her dad. Among them are Charlie Smith, retired trainmaster for Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey; Ward Hall, co-owner of World of Wonders sideshow; elephant trainers Smokey Jones and Rex Williams; and showgirl Barbara Ray who later became the wife of William "Buckles" Woodcock.

Sifting through her old show trunk of memorabilia in the Sarasota mobile home she shares with Pete Cristiani (see separate sidebar on Pete's exploits on Dailey Bros.), Norma pulls out two of her favorite photos. One shows her dad hoisting a baby elephant, Butch, on his shoulders, at the old Dailey Bros. winter quarters in Gonzales, Texas.

The other photo portrays her mother as the beautiful Princess Iola, wearing an Indian headband, and standing only 4-feet, 11 inches tall.

Then Norma begins revealing the myriad ironies of her upbringing. Like her mother, Norma was born in a medicine show wagon and entered her first marriage when she was young--Eva being 15 and Norma 16. Like her father, Norma was respectful of both animals and down-and-out humans. Also like her father, the Davenports' only child became a "workaholic," a trait that she continues to exhibit even in semi-retirement. When she's not booking engagements for her two step-brothers John "Gopher" and Charles "Ter-mite" Davenport Norma can be found helping out in the kitchen of the Sarasota Show Folks Club or espousing her favorite cause, the establishment of a home for aged and indigent circus workers.



Princess Iola, Eva Billings. Norma Cristiani collection.

Norma is a graduate of the school of hard knocks. Her matter-of-fact style as she relates her experiences can be disarming to a "townner" such as the author, who first interviewed her in 2000 and continued as recently as February 2008.

Norma peppers her conversations with the unabashed advisory that "I don't care if you print this, because that's just the way it was." Her stories, and those relating to Ben and Eva, are filled with pathos, yet punctuated by liberal doses of pride and good humor.

#### **Ben Davenport: Farmboy to circus life (via prison).**

Truck used by the Princess Iola show. Norma Cristiani collection.



To understand Ben Davenport's disposition as both an animal lover and cop-hater during his adult years, one must trace his footsteps back to Friendly, West Virginia. On a farm near the Ohio border, Benjamin Coltson Davenport was born on March 13, 1899. Later news stories almost always referred to him as B. C. Davenport. His mother was widowed just two months earlier when Ben's father fell victim to typhoid fever, ironically the same disease that almost claimed Ben's life nearly 50 years later.

Young Ben took an interest in caring for farm animals. He also acquired a fascination for the nomadic way of life. This was more than likely the result of his occasional encounters with horse-trading gypsies on a creek adjacent to the family farm. A trained bear accompanied the roving group. From these experiences, her dad yearned to travel and to have his own "wrasslin" bear.

Ben's mother, unable to eke out a living off the land, eventually moved with her young son and his older sister, Mary, to Delaware, Ohio. Mrs. Davenport managed to make ends meet as a cleaning woman at local houses and at student dormitories on the nearby campus of Ohio Wesleyan University. Ben excelled in athletics in high school and was awarded a football scholarship at the Methodist-affiliated college.

In his first and only semester there he roomed with Vincent Minnelli who later gained fame as a successful motion picture director and husband of box-office star Judy Garland.

Dashing his pious mother's hopes that he would pursue the path of righteousness as a minister, Ben totally rejected religion. In his later years, Davenport did become a Mason and a Shriner.

For whatever reason, Davenport turned to the wild side after dropping out of college. In search of adventure, he became a vagabond on freight



trains. "When he was young, he was always fascinated by the rails," Ms. Cristiani says. "He would jump on railroad cars and ride them."

In his late teens, according to Norma, Ben joined in a plot with one of his West Virginia buddies to steal tires from a storeroom at a Goodyear factory in Akron, Ohio, where both were employed.

The friend supposedly said, "we can just go get those tires, and we can put them in mother's barn in West Virginia. We can leave them there until the heat's off, and then we'll sell them."

The caper was successful, until Ben's friend fenced some of the booty prematurely. Almost immediately, police were able to trace the stolen tires--through recorded serial numbers--to the instigator of the plot. The friend panicked and implicated Ben, leading to their arrest and conviction. Both men were dispatched to prison at Mansfield, Ohio.

Using the prison's steam-pipe system to communicate between separate floors, Ben's friend passed along a warning: "Don't tell them anything." To which Davenport responded, "How do you think I got here in the first place?"

While serving his sentence, Ben was assigned to assist an alcoholic physician at an old soldiers home. Davenport apparently witnessed the alcoholic doctor injecting an elderly patient with a syringe containing air bubbles. The veteran died, and the doctor threatened Ben with death if he informed, Norma was told.

Norma says she learned about her dad's jail time when Ben later confided his experiences to George Smith, the former Ringling Bros. executive who had himself served hard time as a scapegoat for the 1944 circus fire in Hartford, Connecticut.

"God, I never was so ashamed," Davenport told Smith, who managed Dailey Bros. during the circus owner's bout with typhoid fever in 1948. "My poor mother." Ben lamented to his empathetic listener. "She was very religious."

Relating another jackpot, Davenport said he belatedly discovered that the prison inmates who made the new suit issued to him on his release had sewn the zipper in the back of the trousers. "Those sons



Eva Billings as a young girl. Norma Cristiani collection.

of bitches," Davenport laughed.

Norma says her dad looked back on his prison time as "a positive thing, although from then on he

Eva Davenport in 1946. Pfening Archives.



hated the cops. God, did he hate them." In future years, Davenport was more than willing to pay off local law enforcement officials when Dailey Bros. brought its crooked games and "cooch" dancers to town.

Returning to West Virginia after completing a year and a half of his sentence, Davenport began training a horse, "Sparkle." To guide his efforts, he sent off for a mail-order book advertised by Berry's School of Horses in *Billboard* magazine.

Norma says she was told by R. M. Harvey, Davenport's advance agent for many years, that her dad got his first circus job on Robinson's Famous Shows in Peru, Indiana, where he earned \$3 a week as an elephant hand. He may also have been sent out in advance for the circus.

In one of his early solo ventures, Davenport acquired and exhibited "the smallest horse on earth" at various venues.

#### Poof goes the wallet.

Norma also revealed that her dad likely learned the value of having a pickpocket around when he and a high school friend, Eddie Starr of Delaware, Ohio, took out a pit show on a carnival. The small tented attraction boasted snakes, horses and a monkey.

Disappointed with poultry business, Ben and Eddie were ready to pull up stakes when an on-looker approached and asked, "Who owns this show?" Gaining their confidence, the stranger recommended that the pair encourage their monkey to run up and down a pole in front of the tent during their subsequent ballies.

Confused but compliant, the young showmen attracted avid listeners with their speil, but few paid to go in the tent. When Davenport and Starr complained that the monkey had not attracted



business, the man forked over \$50 and, according to Norma, introduced himself as follows:

"My name is Puss, and I'm a pick-pocket." He revealed to the neophytes that they were the beneficiaries of portion of the money he had lifted from the pockets of victims as they watched the monkey's antics. Puss (he never provided his real name) stayed around long enough to fatten the trio's wallets but disappeared before the cops caught on to his quick-fingered collections.

Soon after another show folded on the same lot, and the owner turned the operation over to Davenport and Starr, just to relieve himself of the financial burden. Now running two attractions, the young men hired a woman they knew only as Pauline to helm the snake show.

Unfortunately, one of the serpents bit Pauline, who passed out. Thinking the snake could be venomous, the duo quickly rushed her to a hospital, where they abandoned her with the parting sentiment,



Eva Billings at her piano. Norma Cristiani collection.

"Poor Pauline." The two quickly folded their tents and blew the lot.

Several years later, Norma reveals, her father spotted Pauline--alive and well--walking across the street in another town. "He said he ducked around the corner before she spotted him."

Ms. Cristiani says her father maintained a lengthy friendship with Eddie Starr, who returned to Delaware, Ohio, to become a successful certified public accountant and financial advisor. It was Starr, she discloses, who first suggested to her



The Davenport Society Circus on a lot in the early 1940s. Circus World Museum collection.

father that he name his 1940s circus "Dailey Bros." Ben also kept close ties with the friend who was responsible for the tire heist and the resulting prison term.

In 1925, Davenport joined the Lindemann brothers' Seils-Sterling Circus, bringing along a truck-load of horses (including Sparkle), dogs and monkeys. There he regularly presented an Asian elephant, "Billy Sunday," named after the fire-and-brimstone evangelist. In addition to appearing in almost half the acts during the main performance, Davenport learned magic and the knife act in the sideshow. During his three-year tenure with the Lindemanns, he also became efficient at many facets of operating a circus.

"Dad always gave the Lindemann brothers credit for his later success" as a circus owner, Norma says.

Following the 1928 season, Davenport took his animals in search of another show. This time he became fascinated by the sounds of a calliope as he was passing through a Midwestern town in early 1929. Within a year, he would marry the instrument player, known to her fans as Princess Iola.

**Eva Davenport: Music in her veins, money in her fingers.**



Though Ben soaked up virtually all the complimentary circus press over the years, Norma insists it would be a serious mistake to under estimate the contributions

A herald used by the Society Circus in the 1930s. Circus World Museum collection.

# DAVENPORT'S SOCIETY CIRCUS

**TRAINED DOGS, MONKEYS, PONIES, LIONS**


**GOATS AND BEARS**

**TRAPEZE - LADDER - RINGS - CONTORTION**

## GIRLS! GIRLS!

**Chorus of Singing and Dancing Girls!**



**NOT A MOVING PICTURE!**

N. B. - This Show is a Variety of Circus - Vaudeville Escapes, Trained Animals - For the Entire Family

### ONE DAY ONLY



of her mother to the Davenports' enterprises—especially where finances were concerned.

Eva Lola Billings was born into show business in 1892 while her parents, Gay and Essa Billings, were on tour with a wagon circus.

"I probably was born in a circus wagon on the lot" (at Liberty Mills, Indiana), Eva told a reporter in the mid-40s. Eva's father took out Gay's One-Horse Circus. Norma remembers her grandfather as being a "good tenor singer," but also being "quite a shyster."



Norma at age one. Norma Cristiani collection.

In a story published September 22, 1946, in the Quincy *Herald Whig*, Eva Billings Davenport explained how the circus got its name.

"Mrs. Davenport recalls that her father had about 80 head of horses with that show. Mr. Billings called it a 'one-horse' show because he pulled his wagons tandem style—one horse ahead of the other—and then, too, as he figured, folks were already calling it 'just another one-horse circus' so he beat them to the comment by giving the unusual name to the outfit."

Eva's parents also fielded their own medicine show and performed together on the vaudeville circuit. They wintered in Marblehead, Illinois, near Quincy. Years later, Norma returned to her mother's home in Quincy to give birth to her children by Pete Cristiani.

Under her parents' tutelage, Eva Billings learned trapeze, loop walking, contortion and hand balancing.

Eva spent several years at St. Mary's Institute in Marshalltown, Iowa, where the nuns described her

as a brilliant musician.

Because the musical prodigy could play by ear and transpose in any key, Eva was in constant demand as an accompanist. She also played organ or piano as silent movies flickered on theatre screens.

Eventually, Eva's parents had to quit circus life because of Mr. Billing's failing eyesight, and Eva was on her own, the Quincy newspaper reported, "She started her own Princess Lola medicine show."

In her first marriage, at age 15, to Bill Merriam, Eva had three children—daughters Zoe and Billie and son Galen. The sibling trio sang, danced and played various musical instruments while their mother emceed performances.

According to a 1950 account in *Billboard*, Eva's first husband shot himself in 1929 while the Princess Lola medicine show was playing a small town near Dayton, Ohio.

"After the funeral," the *Billboard* story continued, "the Princess wired Davenport, then at Medina, O. to line up halls for winter dates and to try to hold the show together."

#### **Ben and Eva: a dynamic duo.**

Ben and Eva exchanged wedding vows in 1930. Eva gave birth to Norma on January 26, 1931, in a 25-foot wooden trailer that Ben had built and mounted on a truck bed. Previously, the roving Davenports had stayed in hotels and boarding houses.

Norma said she was named after the Hollywood star Norma Shearer, but that her mother called her Baby Thing. Actually, Eva was nursing two infants at the same time. The other one was a baby rhesus monkey, Norma candidly points out. The monkey was her mother's pet.

By the time Norma arrived, the Depression had swept the country and was expanding around the globe.

Many businesses were failing, and county poor farms were overflowing



Norma at age six. Norma Cristiani collection.

with indigents who worked the fields to help pay for their upkeep.

Ben and Eva would need draw upon all their combined skills to feed and clothe their brood following the Wall Street crash in October 1929.

The medicine show's business was forced to shut down temporarily in 1932 while in Ohio. Ben hired onto the Milton Holland Indoor Circus, which, as Norma points out, was the forerunner of Polack Bros. Circus. The Holland show toured the Pacific Northwest for 26 weeks.

On that show, Davenport demonstrated his career-long workaholic capacities. "He was almost the whole show," says Norma. "He fought the lions; he wrestled the bear; he did the clowning, and he did the dog act."

Between acts, circus patrons were encouraged to play the "pitch-til-you-win" games that encircled the performance area. "A lot of them were really racket stuff," Norma was told. "My dad, or another performer, would do an act. Then everybody would get up and play these games. This went on all day."

Proceeds from grift enabled Ben to take home a handsome \$325 per week. When business dwindled, Milt Holland threatened to cut his star





The Dailey Bros. truck circus in 1942. Circus World Museum collection.

performer's pay. Eva put her foot down. "I can sell that much medicine in one night," Eva purportedly told her husband.

Norma, who had taken her first steps on the Holland circuit, made her performing debut as a dancer on the revived Princess Iola medicine show. There, the talents of her parents clicked. Both brought demonstrated performing abilities to their marriage. In addition, Ben had learned the ropes of putting up, tearing down and transporting a show, while Eva had excelled as a pitchwoman and in handling money. For her part, Eva contributed a going enterprise, complete with truck-mounted calliope. Ben made steam and air calliopes the trademark of his future shows.

Norma credits her mother as being the financial brains behind the team during their two-decade collaboration. As Ben would discover when he and Eva separated in 1949.

"Princess Iola" pushed her medicinal herbs wherever the elaborate show appeared in small towns throughout Illinois, Missouri and Iowa. Some accounts list the title of the show as "Princess Iola Vanity Fair Co.," but Norma does not recall that name.

Standing on a platform with a ramp that sloped down into the audience, the diminutive Eva pitched laxatives "To tell the truth," Norma's mother would say privately, "most people need to take a good s - t." Princess Iola boasted to townies that her ointments would cure any itch

and that her curatives would eliminate tapeworms, a common malady of the human digestive tract in those days. She also sold countless bars of soap by bringing children to the front of the platform and demonstrating the healthful benefits of hand-washing.

Twenty-five years later, according to Norma, a St. Louis newspaper would print this notice from a former satisfied patron: "Any one knowing the whereabouts of Princess Iola please let us know. Her medicine is the only thing that ever stopped the itch."

Although the charismatic Eva stopped short of assuming the role of faith healer, Norma relates an incident in Danville, Illinois, when a crippled boy—coming under Princess Iola's spell—threw away his crutches and hobbled up to the stage. Norma laughs while recalling that after word of the miracle spread throughout Danville, the welcome mat was always out for her mother to return. In fact, says Norma, the medicine show could extend later stands there up to six weeks because of the notoriety attached to the incident.

Eva's real gift for talk emerged when she deployed her system to rake in even more cash from her enthralled audiences. Norma said

many others tried to duplicate her mother's tried-and-true recipe, which she kept secret to her grave. Basically, here's how it worked:

Ben and Eva's band of performers usually pulled into a community on Monday, renting a town hall or vacant store for the next five days. On Tuesday, Eva's calliope and an attached sign announcing "Princess Iola Here Today" attracted locals to a free performance. Utilizing an elaborate backdrop, the show featured dancing and singing by Norma's older half sisters, Zoe and Billie Merriam, and a few other acts. As the evening drew to a close, Eva unveiled details of a beauty pageant, with the queen to be crowned on the show's final night.

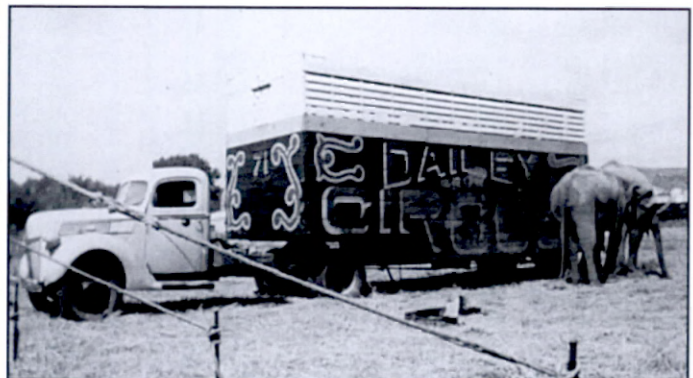
She invited the townies to enter their favorite contestant into the competition. There would be no judging. Instead, Eva's system worked something similar to an old-fashion pie auction, but with an interesting twist.

Princess Iola gave out coupons with the purchase of each of her products. The coupons translated into votes. Simply put, the contestant with the most "votes" took home the crown on Saturday night.

Eva also announced that patrons would have to pay a separate admissions charge for the subsequent shows, each differing from the previous night.

Always aware that her scheme might generate heat, Princess Iola took care to shower her loyal followers with giveaways on Saturday night in preparation for crowning the queen. These gifts included dishes,

The Dailey Bros. elephant semi in 1943. Pfening Archives.





silverware and dolls—the later being a favorite collectable of the era.

The sponsor of one beauty contest—ant became so enraged during the final night of the competition that, in an obvious attempt to get his money back, he rushed the stage.

Seeing him toting an armful of “flash,” Princess Iola quickly turned the tables on her adversary. “How did you get all that merchandise?” she yelled. “You’re not supposed to have all that stuff.” The man quickly retreated into the crowd, suddenly pleased with his rewards.

Just in case her spiels didn’t soothe the audience’s ire, Eva and Ben would have instructed the roving troupe to have their vehicles packed up and ready to pull out immediately following the coronation.

On good weeks, Princess Iola came away with bountiful proceeds from sales of products and beauty-contest coupons, as well as gate receipts.

### Launching Davenport’s Society Circus.

Davenports poured the earnings back into the show. In 1934, he was able to outfit a new one-ring outdoor show, the Society Circus. This upgrade enabled Ben and Eva also began year-round touring. The circus played mostly one-day stands from spring to fall and the medicine show filled out the winter months indoors.

Between show dates either Ben or Eva drove the truck pulling the family trailer, which included a coal-burning stove bolted to the floor, Ms. Cristiani says her father always took great pride in the appearance of his rolling stock.

Transported on two trucks, the circus had a small tent, which also could be used for medicine show dates), but workers usually raised only sidewalls for performances. Eva told the Quincy reporter that “I guess we had two ponies, 14 dogs and three or four monkeys.” Once again, Ben’s routines constituted half the line up. A “Girl Revue,” advertised prominently on show vehicles, attracted the males. In addition to giving pitches, Eva accompanied the performance on her ever-present calliope.

As the circus and medicine routes expanded amid the deepening

depression, the Davenports had more mouths to feed.

With unemployment rampant, the Davenports provided work for homeless people along the way. “We never lacked for help in those days. Mother said they would just stay out, and if anybody had any food or money, they would share it. They never wintered; they just kept going.

“We also had a lot of young people in our business who left town because they were in trouble,” Norma remembers. “Their parents would just drop them off and say, ‘Take good care of them.’”

One who joined—with his parents’ blessing—was Gerald “Charlie” Smith of Pleasant Hill, Illinois. Smith replaced his older brother (who wanted to return home to get married) as the drummer on the show’s 10-piece orchestra, which also featured three alto saxophones, violin, guitar, banjo, and xylophone. Smith was one of a new generation of performers who got their start with the circus thanks to the willingness of the owners to pass along circus skills to the neophytes. Smith reached the pinnacle of his circus



Eva and Ben Davenport. Norma Cristiani collection.

career as the trainmaster for Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey. He is the namesake of Circus Fans of America Tent 131 and, like the Davenports, is an inductee of the Sarasota Ring of Fame.

Being on Ben Davenport’s shows

offered no free ride, as the newbies would find out. In addition to laboring to set up and tear down the show, they also learned to perform various routines.

Smith, for example, assembled a five-person Roman-rings act, which included his wife, Norma and her half sister Billie Merriam. He also performed knife-throwing and chair-balancing comedy. In the medicine show, he played drums and donned blackface make up for an “after-piece,” a play entitled “Over the River, Charlie.” That’s how Smith got the nickname that followed him thereafter.

The medicine show’s loyal troupe also consisted of numerous relatives and friends of Eva Davenport. They included Bertha Drane, who played the calliope and fulfilled other duties. Mrs. Drane’s daughters, Virginia and Mildred, also performed. The Drane sisters married co-performers on the show—Virginia became Mrs. Charlie Smith, and Mildred was wed to Paul Pyle, who, in the late 1940s, became boss canvassman on the Dailey show.

Eva’s sister, Ethel, had married Fred Stock. Among their 10 children was Rosemary Stock, who joined Dailey Bros. as a teen and performed with cousin Norma on numerous acts.

Ben Davenport treated his wife like a true princess, Norma says. Her mother was an avid smoker, and Norma recalls the numerous occasions when Eva, perched on a raised bed in the family trailer, would call out: “Ben, have the boys go out and pick me up some butts.”

In response, Davenport dispatched workmen to troll the lots and streets in search of discarded cigarette butts. Eva recycled the tobacco bits into roll-your-own cigarette paper and smoked them.

“My father said she was like a queen sitting up there,” Norma chuckles. “He admired my mother. He really did.

“They had some rough times. Jesus! But my mother was always an optimist. I never heard her say, ‘Oh God, things are bad.’ I never, never, never heard her say that.



"She carried on. In this business, I guess you do. In this business, I don't see too many rich show people. I really don't." And Norma laughed again.

Norma recalls that when the show was unable to make its nut in some communities, workers resorted to siphoning gas from circus-goers'

One sheet upright featuring "Little Norma." Pfening Archives.



cars during the night performance so the troupe could make its way to the next town. They also fanned out to raid nearby chicken coops. (The lion got first dibs on the pilfered chickens.)

"I don't care if you print this," Norma states, "because that's just the way it was. They did whatever they needed to do to survive."

Using the phrase often repeated in the depression era, Norma says "I never knew we didn't have any money. We never had a Christmas tree, but I never thought anything about it. Dad said it was too commercial."

As Davenport expanded his human troupe, he also enlarged his menagerie of animals.

In addition to dogs and horses, Davenport's shows also carried Daisy the fighting lion, Jupiter the grave-robbing hyena, and Teddy the wrestling bear.

Daisy was almost a family pet, although she would seem ferocious in the ring when Davenport presented her. "If my father would raise a chair in the cage, the lion would roar. And when he set the chair down, the roaring would stop."

On frigid nights, Ben uncaged Daisy and brought the lioness into the rented town hall or tent so the animal could sleep near the family close to a coal-fed fire.

#### "Dog Red" joins the cast.

Davenport's bear, Teddy, was the featured act on opening night at each medicine show stand. Charlie Smith and another worker came out to wrestle the bear. Davenport then would offer \$25 to any one in the audience who could put Teddy down and spread his front legs out.

As Smith recalls in one of his internet posts, "We were playing Muscouth, Illinois, when Raymond 'Red' Freivogal came up on 'Bear Night' to win the \$25. However, he got his finger caught in the muzzle, and the



Raymond "Red" Freivogal, the Dailey elephant man. Pfening Archives.

bear bit his finger off."

To avert a potential lawsuit, Ben persuaded Freivogel's parents to let the young man join the show. "Ben made a dog boy out of Red, and we called him 'Dog Red,'" Smith remembers.

In yet another incident, recalls Smith, "Ben and I were hooking up the girls' trailer to the truck that towed it, when the hitch got loose from us and took the hide off Ben's leg--from his knee to his ankle.

"I always sat across from Ben in the cookhouse. One hot day we had the cookhouse tables set up under some shade trees, when Dog Red was letting the dogs out for a run.

"The dogs got under the table between Ben and me and got into a vicious fight. I kicked at them and accidentally kicked Ben on that sore shin. He fell backward and landed on the ground on his back. He looked at me," relates Smith, "and yelled, 'Damn you, boy, don't you ever kick them dogs.'"

Proving his worth as an animal handler, Freivogel later earned the responsibility of caring for and presenting "Nemo," the first elephant acquired by Davenport for Dailey Bros. The handler would remain on the show until his death. Dog Red



was only one of the many "characters" that Ben Davenport collected. "My dad loved the working people a lot more than he did the performers," Norma insists.

Demonstrating her father's compassionate side, she points to his hiring a man with somewhat diminished mental capacities whom she remembers only as "Front Door Slim"—the nickname reflecting the workman's primary responsibility for raising the big top marquee.

In one town where the circus was playing, Slim mentioned to the owner that his brother was a resident in the local hospital for the mentally retarded. Davenport visited Slim's sibling and, after negotiating with hospital officials, took him back to the circus grounds. Ben and Eva welcomed him as their ward. (Norma is uncertain whether her parents formally adopted him.)

From then on, says Norma, whenever any one asked the retarded man his name, he would respond, "Teddy Davenport." Teddy died in 1952 when he apparently fell out of the back of a moving Davenport circus truck as it was climbing a steep grade and was run over by a trailing vehicle.

#### **The Davenports trouped under the Society Circus title for five seasons.**

Norma, learning her craft as a performer, experienced her first elephant encounter in 1939. It was unforgettable.

Although she was fuzzy on details concerning the location of the lot, Norma recalls that she was left unsupervised to keep a water tub filled for "Maxine" while the bull's owner, Franko Richards, went into town. (She remembers Richards as being the son of a circus owner.)

When Norma attempted to pull the tub toward a pump to top it off, Maxine slapped her 8-year-old sitter across her face and bloodied her nose. Although Norma would receive



Norma and a friend in 1943. Pfening Archives.

billing within a few short years as "the world's youngest elephant trainer," she muses that, because of her rough treatment by Maxine, "I was scared to death of elephants."

As the nation's economy continued to deteriorate, the fortunes of the circus went into a tailspin, Norma's parents bundled her off in 1939 to live with Ben's sister, Mary, and her husband, Waldo Lawson, in Parkersburg, West Virginia, not far from Ben's birthplace. If Norma found her elephant experience unsettling, by comparison the cultural shock which accompanied the relocation was even more traumatic.

Consider that in her formative years, Norma had few, if any, friends her age because of her parent's frequent jumps. Whenever she did encounter other children on the streets of the towns visited by the medicine show or circus, she found herself being taunted and labelled "gypsy."

Until being taken in by her uncle and aunt who were both educators in Parkersburg, Norma says she had

never been inside a church and had attended school only intermittently. Aunt Mary outfitted Norma in her first dress and high-topped shoes that buttoned up the side. The eight-year-old had to accept regimented meal times and to learn proper table manners.

When Norma's relatives enrolled her in the first grade in the fall of 1939, following required inoculations against childhood diseases, "I couldn't let anybody know I'd been with a circus. I told them I was born into society, and I could prove it, because the sign was painted on the circus trucks."

Equipped with street smarts that she brought to the classroom, and with additional tutoring, Norma excelled at academics

and was able to jump ahead two grades. She also joined the school band, playing a saxophone sent by her father. (Norma says a gambler on the circus won the instrument off a mark. Davenport had introduced grift during her absence.)

Norma's parents visited her only once while she was living with her strict but loving relatives in West Virginia.

In 1941, Ben Davenport showed up in Parkersburg for a brief stay, he was driving a new Chevy rag-top convertible. Norma recognized at once that her parents' fortunes had improved during her absence.

By the time Norma rejoined the show in 1942, the one-ring show had been transformed into the three-ring Dailey Bros. Circus. Grifters had taken refuge in and around the new side show, featuring Eva Davenport as the talker.

#### **NEXT: Norma Davenport becomes a center-ring star.**

The author gratefully acknowledges the collaboration of Norma Davenport Cristiani, who submitted to numerous personal and phone interviews over a nine-year period, to



make this account possible. Pete Cristiani also made himself available for lengthy interviews, from which the author prepared the accompanying sidebar about Cristiani's experience as a fill-in "fixer" on Dailey Bros.

The author also drew from interviews with Charlie Smith, as well as information on the CFA Charlie Smith Tent #141 internet web site. Also useful were a series of articles by Leland Antes Jr. on the Davenports and Dailey Bros. published in *Bandwagon* in 1970. Further information on Ben and Eva Davenport's early years came from two articles from archives of the Circus World Museum in Baraboo, Wisconsin. The first was a story appearing in the September 22, 1946 issue of the Quincy, Illinois, *Herald Whig*, entitled, "Quincy and Marblehead '2nd Homes' For Only Woman Circus Owner in U.S.," written by Dave Tuffli. The second story, penned by Fred H. Phelps, was published in the May 13, 1950, edition of *Billboard* magazine. Comments by Charles Phillip Fox and Tom Parkinson on the Dailey Bros. grift were taken from their landmark book, *The Circus in America*, published in 1969 and reprinted in 2002.

#### **SUBBING FOR THE FIXER: PETE CRISTIANI GOES TO TOWN**

Pete Cristiani was being rudely shaken awake in his Dailey Bros. sleeper compartment. Dawn was breaking outside on a spring Sunday morning in 1950, and the 25-car circus train was parked on a siding in Wichita Falls, Texas, not many miles from the Oklahoma border.

Groggy from having closed down the show's pie car only three hours before, Cristiani opened his eyes to see Ben Davenport hovering above him.

In an excited voice, the owner told Cristiani, "Joe Baker (the legal adjuster) is drinking, and you've got to go over and do the fixing."

A haven for gamblers, Dailey Bros. relied on paying off the law at each stop to permit the show to run its consumer-unfriendly games and to offer "cooch" dancers in the side show blow-off.

Although he was generally useful, Cristiani rebelled at this latest assignment.

"Ben," he protested, "I've never done that before."

"Well, sh-t," Davenport reasoned, "you just go on over there and do it. Run into the sheriff and see what he says."



Pete Cristiani. Pfening Archives.

Quickly shaving and dressing, Cristiani took off on his mission. His instincts, honed from experience on other shows, kicked in.

"I remember a few years before that around the Cole show, I heard some of the old-timers say that when you wanted to know who to fix in the town, go to the big pool hall. Usually the guy that runs the pool hall knows who's on the take.

"So I went to this big pool hall in Wichita Falls. And I asked the owner, and he said, 'Well, go by and see the sheriff. He'll be the right guy. He'll listen to you.'

"I went in to see the sheriff, and he said, 'It'll be \$300, I want 200 passes, for all my people.'

"So I said, 'I'm giving this for your charity; I'm making a charitable donation.'"

To which the sheriff merely laughed and responded, "Yeah, I'll give it to my charity."

Before leaving the lawman's office, Cristiani also was instructed to pay a courtesy call on a state highway

patrol trooper nearby, because, said the sheriff, "he won't put up with the grift."

After accepting \$100 and 50 passes from the neophyte fixer, the trooper issued this stern advice: "The Baptist preacher, he don't care about all the three-card monte, the shell game, the skip-the-spindle. He don't

care how many games you run. But he don't want the girls taking their clothes off. He don't want those girls showing their asses out there."

When he returned to the lot, Cristiani's final duty was to collect the amount of the fix from the gamblers and to alert the sideshow to nix the cooch blow-off.

Afterwards, he proudly reported on his successful negotiations and turned over the gamblers' rebate to owner Davenport, who immediately lost his temper.

"He said, 'Why did you tell those guys (the grifters) how much money you gave the sheriff and the trooper? Dammit, if you get it fixed for \$300, you tell them it was for \$700 or \$800, and you and I split the difference. And when you give out the passes, tell them you had to give 500 passes because we also get a dollar from the grifters for each pass that the fixer handed out.'"

"So Ben cursed me out for telling the gamblers the truth."

As if to reinforce the idiom that "nothing's free in life," each beneficiary of the fixer's so-called "free pass" was hit with a 50-cent fee--supposedly for federal, state and local taxes--at the service box, staffed by Davenport's daughter and Pete's wife, Norma, along with Norma's cousin, Rosemary Stock. The regular adult admission charge at that time was one dollar.

"There was no tax back then," Cristiani mused, "but the local people didn't know it, so it was covered up as a service charge.

"But anyway, that was an experience."



# The Goodrich, Hoffman and Southey Show: Incorporating A Connecticut Circus

By John Polacsek

*This paper was presented at the 2007 Circus Historical Society convention.*

Planning for the future is what good circus owners always hope they can do. With a profitable wagon show on the road in 1900, the owners of the Goodrich Circus saw a need to expand their future operations. When the opportunity knocked it was up to the three owners, James Goodrich, Lewis Hoffman and Alfred Southey to get the job done.

It was September 14, 1900 when Lew Hoffman and Al Southey met with Mrs. W. H. Price in New York City. Mrs. Price was the owner of nine wagons loaded with the show property of the Price & James Circus, which was in storage since September 14, 1897 at Homer Pease's warehouse in Springfield, Mass. For the rate of nine dollars per month, the material had been kept safe and secure, but that was to soon change.

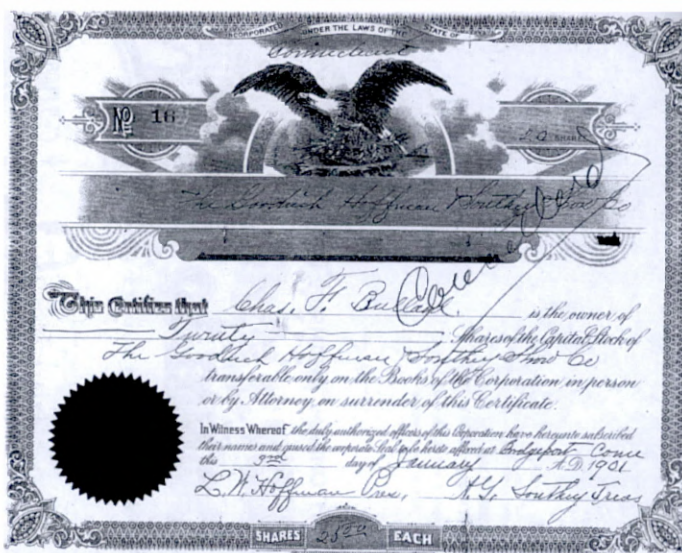
For the payment of \$50.00 Mrs. Price was selling to Hoffman & Southey of Bridgeport, Conn., all of the show property. From the September 14th date Hoffman & Southey were to pay the storage that was due on the property. As with most long term storage arrangements, even at \$9.00 per month, the cost of storage makes it unreasonable to hold on to the material for long, and a deal for Hoffman & Southey.

After hopping a fast train, Al Southey arrived in Springfield, Mass. on September 15 and negotiated with Homer Pease, who provided the following receipt: Received of Hoffman & Southey. The sum of \$180.00 in full for all rent and storage of the Price & James Show property to January 1st 1901.

If the show property should remain in the storage after

January 1, 1901 the rent will be Four dollars per month.

In October 1900 the season ended and the wagons, tent, equipment and animals of the Goodrich, Hoffman and Southey Show were brought back to winter quarters in Bridgeport, Conn. The owners of the show James Goodrich, Lewis Hoffman, and Alfred Southey decided to use a new tactic to obtain the necessary capital to upgrade the



A stock certificate issued in 1901. All illustrations are from the author unless otherwise credited.

show, to incorporate as a stock company under the laws of the State of Connecticut.

In order for the incorporation it became a reality, it was necessary to

Lithograph showing the owners. John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Tibbals Digital collection.





recall Al Southey who on October 25 was in Washington D.C on show business. Al was headed south to Richmond, Virginia and was to arrive the next morning at 8:30 as after a 4-hour train ride. He noted that his partners should "Give the post a squib that I am in the South in the interest of the show business," noting that this "Keeps the people guessing."

On his way to Richmond Southey noted that "I found Sawtelle here 40 miles north of Richmond. He has a fine show but no business here in the country. The roads something terrible. I will be home I think sometime Sunday."

On November 2, 1900 the ledger book for the show noted that that the G. H. & S. Show Company commenced business today with an incorporated capital of \$15,000.00. The stock of the show all 600 shares was divided as follows:

Lewis W. Hoffman - 280 shares at \$25.00 each \$7,000.

James W. Goodrich - 160 shares of stock \$25.00 each \$4,000.

Al G. Southey 160 shares of stock \$25.00 each \$4,000.

#### THE JOURNAL OF THE GOODRICH, HOFFMAN & SOUTHEY SHOW COMPANY

The First meeting of the stock holders of the Goodrich, Hoffman and Southey Show Company was held November 2nd, 1900 at 7:30 pm. The Articles of Association of the G, H & S Show Company were signed, verified and published. It was then voted by the members that the Articles be adopted. In addition the By Laws were prepared and presented by Mr. William Hincks, Counsel for the subscribers, and they were approved.

The first annual meeting of the company was to be held on the second Thursday of November 1901 and annually thereafter. The following directors were elected to serve until the First Annual Meeting. Lewis W. Hoffman, James W. Goodrich and Alfred G. Southey.

**THE GOODRICH SHOWS**

**THE GOODRICH, HOFFMAN & SOUTHEY SHOW CO.**

OWNERS.

---

Famous One Ring Show,

Hippodrome  
and Menagerie.

---

WINTER QUARTERS,  
Bridgeport, Conn.  
P. O. Box 531.



J. W. GOODRICH.




Incorporated under the laws  
of Connecticut and fully  
paid in.



L. W. HOFFMAN.





A. G. SOUTHEY.

Letterhead used by the show in 1901.

The Directors then went into a meeting starting at 9 p.m. as all three being present, and Lew was chosen temporary Chairman and Al the temporary Secretary. It was voted that officers be elected according to the By Laws and Lew was elected President, James was Vice-President and Al the Secretary and Treasurer.


It was then voted that the President be authorized and instructed to purchase of the owners of the Goodrich Shows all of the stock, fixtures, assets and good will of the same.

The purchase of this property was to amount to \$15,000, and it was to be taken out of the funds in the Treasury from subscriptions to the capital stock.

The Certificate of Incorporation noted that the directors of the G, H & S Show Company was a corporation organized under the Statute Laws of

Another letterhead used by the show.

**THE JAMES W. GOODRICH SHOWS.**



**THE GOODRICH-HOFFMAN-SOUTHEY SHOW COMPANY.**

BRIDGEPORT, CONN.

the State of Connecticut regulating the formation of joint stock corporations, and located in the City of Bridgeport, County of Fairfield and State of Connecticut.

Article 1 - The name by which the corporation shall be known is the Goodrich, Hoffman & Southey Show Company.

Article 2- The purpose for which it is formed is to carry on the business of conducting and maintaining exhibitions and shows: giving musical, gymnastic and vaudeville entertainments and exhibitions; conducting a museum and all other exhibitions of a similar nature; of buying, selling, leasing and dealing in horses, wagons, and rolling stock of all kinds; tents, canvas, stock, paraphernalia and fixtures appertaining to the show business, and of doing generally everything hat is necessary for the conduct and maintenance of an exhibition and show, and also of buying, selling and holding such real estate as may be necessary for the conduct and maintenance of said show enterprise and exhibition.

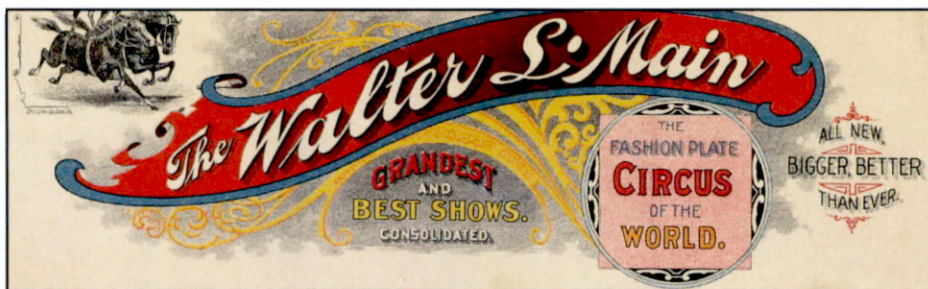
Article 3 The Corporation is to be located in the City of Bridgeport, County of Fairfield, State of Connecticut.

Article 4 - The amount of its stock is \$15,000 divided into 600 shares at \$25.00 each.

Article 5 - Lew 280 shares, James 160 shares, and Al 160 shares.

The Articles of Association were to be published at full length in the





Letterhead used by Walter L. Main in 1901. Pfening Archives.

*Morning Union*, a newspaper published in Fairfield County.

All of the subscribers to the capital stock were residents of Bridgeport, Connecticut.

November 8, 1900 Meeting of the Board of Directors

The full board met and Lew turned in to the Treasury 139 shares of stock, James and Al both turned in 80 shares. This stock was to be sold for the benefit of the company, and the proceeds thereof to be used in the purchase of new stock and equipment. It was also noted that all Directors will have one vote each without reference to the number of shares of stock being held.

On November 8, 1900 the owners of the show then sold a portion of their stock back to the show along with an inventory of the material, the name of the show, and the good will of the show. The stock that was sold back to the show them was listed as Treasury stock and it could be resold to other potential investors.

Lewis W. Hoffman sold back 139 shares of stock with a value of \$3,475.00

James W. Goodrich sold back 40 shares of stock with a value of \$2,000.00

Al. G. Southey sold back 40 shares of stock with a value of \$2,000.00

The show needed cash as correspondence arrived in response to letters that had been written to other showmen who had recently advertised excess

equipment for sale in the New York Clipper.

From Geneva, Ohio Walter L. Main wrote in response to a letter of November 8 inquiring what he had for sale: The Rhoda Royal circus is supposed to be here the first week of December, cannot tell exactly what date but will let you know later. I have made up my mind not to split it up. Will sell the entire outfit for \$5000 cash, no less.

It is the cream of the Main show, 9 cars, 53 head of horses and ponies; 7 cages of animals; two young female elephants the finest in America.

The Great Rhoda Royal Australian Railroad Shows was late getting back to the Geneva winter quarters for the show was booked through the third week of December playing South Carolina and Georgia. On December 17 and 18 the show closed its regular season in Savannah, Georgia. At that time 4 cars, or about half of the show went out as the Great Rhoda Royal Circus starting at Blackshear,

Another litho used by the Goodrich show. John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Tibbals Digital collection.

Georgia December 20. The show spent the next month in Florida going as far south as Key West then coming up the west coast and playing at Tarpon Springs, St. Petersburg, Lakeland, and Tampa.

Walter L. Main continued by saying: If I cannot get this amount of it I think I will send it

out next summer as I am satisfied I can clear \$25000 and have the property left, and if I ever want a large show again I have got a foundation to build on. I think Mr. Goodrich saw the property or a part of it at Rockville, Conn., as I was there that day and Royal said he had not left town when the Rhoda Royal aggregation arrived.

James Goodrich saw not only the arrival of the show but the performance at Rockville, Conn. on September 8, 1900. A note identified as the Rhoda Royal Show in Goodrich's handwriting listed the following:

5 Cages and one additional cage but it was not open

One Elephant

18 Ponies & 45 horses

1 pony ride

The performance was listed as Entrée-4 Ring horses and 7 Rough Riders

1 elephant

Lot of ponies-14

Double high horizontal bar

Lot of clowns

1 lady on wire & Clowns on web

63 horse act with 39 horses

Clowns

6 ponies & Clowns

Juggling boy

2 Donalays

Hippodrome Races - Pony Race no drivers  
Rough Riders after show

Walter L. Main continued-No doubt you understand that show property and everything else will go up in value now, as the next four years will be the biggest business circuses have ever had. The cars are all Youngstown, Ohio make; harness all





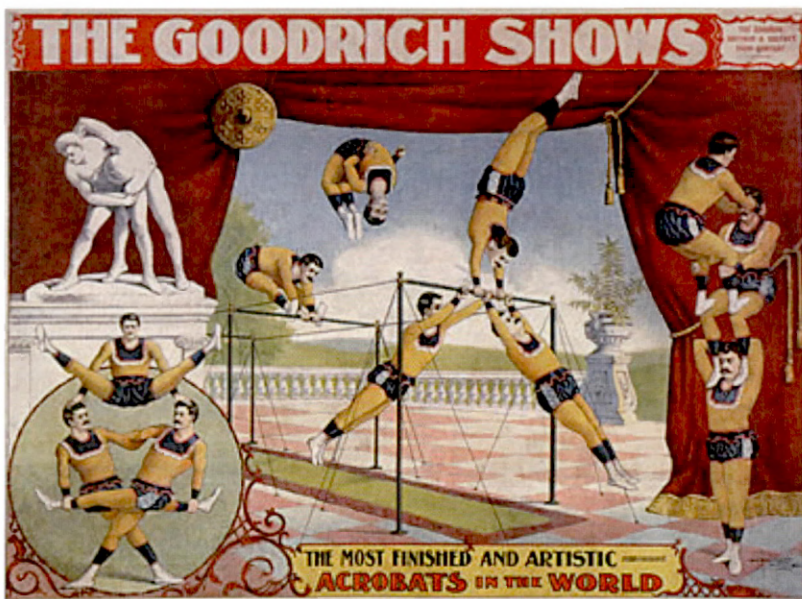
Concord, and every horse, except the pull-up team goes in the one big act. There are several trained horses and ponies in the lot and they give over half the show; also about 10 of the horses are broken for rough-riders. The baggage wagons are all made by the Milburn Co., Toledo, in fact everything is good and solid. Fine calliope and fine ticket wagon. The canvas does not belong to me. I would not take a dollar less than the price asked and don't care much about selling at that.

Respectfully, Walter L. Main

In regards to the availability of horses John Mansan of Malane, New York noted on November 26 that there was a lot of competition for good horses:

I received a letter from you wanting to know if you could buy 20 pair of horses in this section. I think you could buy them but they would cost you more than you want to pay. I have made quite a little enquiries round and find the kind of horses you want is in good demand to go to the lumber camps, if you did not want them until next March you could buy them when they are done logging. Lumber is high and they are paying big wages for men and horses to go to the woods. Horses here now that would suit your business would cost you one hundred dollars a head if you could strike the lumber camps in March. I think you could buy them right and they would be in fine shape to go on to the road.

A letter on November 27 arrived with an offer from the C. H. Pender Parlor of Fun Company, still enroute and proclaimed to be "Not the largest show on the



Another litho used by the Goodrich show. John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Tibbals Digital collection.

road but one of the best."

Gents: In answer to your favor of November 23rd will say that at this writing I have only one wagon left all others being sold. The remaining wagon is a fine platform spring one nearly as good as new. The box is

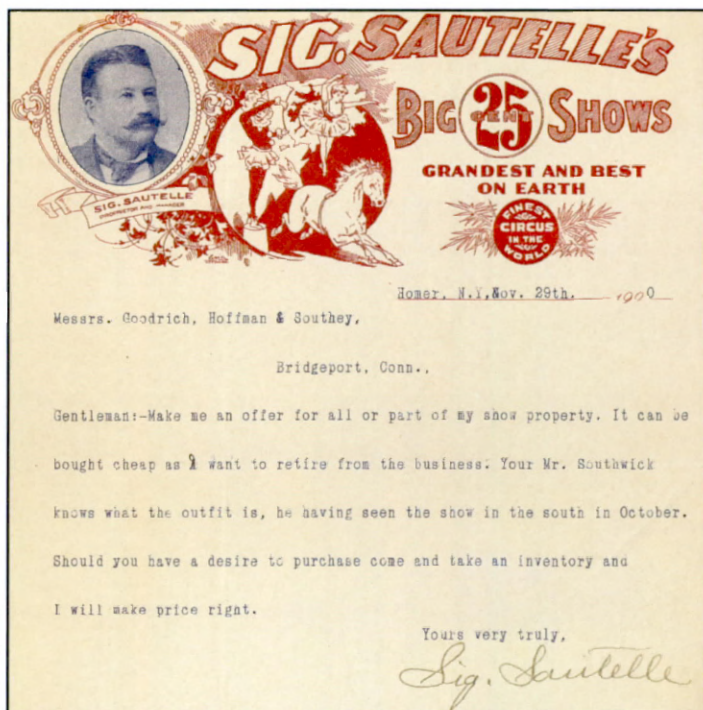
Sig Sautelle's letter to the Goodrich show. Author's collection.

condition, "a dandy looker" and a bargain. About one ton and a half is all it will safely carry.

The 8 tune crank organ is a good one and with a very little repairing by one who understands it, it could be made to sound as good as a new one. Will sell it for \$25.00 and will send it with privilege of examination and pay freight one way if not satisfactory.

The letter was from the show's Medina, New York winter quarters. From New Albany, Indiana, Rice's Famous Dogs and Ponies presented by Prof. Charles E. Rice and Mrs. Effie C. Rice wrote on December 1.

I can fill your bill. 17 Shetland ponies ranging from 38 to 42 inches to one 52 and one 53 inches. Swell troupe of dogs - Including a diving dog. These ponies are beauties and great little juvenile actors. I worked them all last year, 10 of them not over 4 years old, one is 7 and one 9 years old. Time of the pony act runs fully 30 minutes. The dogs 18 minutes. You can have the bunch for two thousand five hundred dollars. This includes riding dog & goat. Don't ask me to cut this price in halves. They are worth





what I ask & they will bring it too.

Prof. Chas E. Rice

A letter from Toledo, Ohio on December 8 to James W. Goodrich noted that the following equipment was available from the showman J. Moriarty:

The 125 ft round top is in 6 quarters - 10 foot side wall - 12 quarter poles- center poles -stakes & ring stakes all complete this Top has 4 or 6 small patches But in good fair shape. Good for 2 seasons at least has good side wall & has been put away in good dry shape Has 4 main guy ropes. Complete \$290.00

New marquee entrance 16 x 21 striped with words Main Entrance. Six front poles and stakes \$28.00.

Horse Tent 24 x 70 - 6 foot side wall all round gable end poles and stakes this is not patched or torn used about 4 weeks \$48.00.

Dining Tent 24 x 50 same as Horse Tent nearly new poles & stakes price \$38.00.

Dressing tent 30 x 50 and 10 foot wall this tent has several patches could be used one season \$35.00 stakes and poles.

Have two good stake pullers price \$7.00 each.

One 2 arm 50 jet each arm Kidd Star Burner good price \$35.00

One Beacon light \$8.00

6 nearly new Horse mangers \$2.00 each

20 length 10 tier seats - iron backs Norway stringers 3 jacks to each stringer seat plank 6 x 7 x 8 inches wide painted blue toe pins with stringers price \$5.00 per length.

Bandwagon shaped like cut molding trimmed in gold body painted bright red 2 beveled glass on each side bench 4 ft wide and 11 feet long price \$75.00.

Ticket wagon 4 x 10 feet long 5 ft. high to stand inside cupola top-2 ticket windows on end & side door entry on side Painted dark, gold trimming \$75.00.

Good as new stringer wagon heavy \$40.00 Passenger wagon seats 20 seat on side end step price \$50.00

Canvas top painted black, 5 bag-

**The Calhoun Show Print Co.**  
ESTABLISHED 1858. REORGANIZED 1901.  
UP-TO-DATE ARTISTS - IN BOTH PICTORIAL AND BLOCK DEPARTMENTS.  
The Old Time Reputation for Prompt Shipments will be Maintained.  
Address All Communications to CALHOUN SHOW PRINT CO. 35 UNION PLACE.  
Hartford, Conn., U.S.A. March 28, 1901  
Goodrich, Hoffman & Southey Co., Bridgeport Conn.  
We can furnish you 1 sheet cloth banner 30 inches wide and 42 inches long, 100 of each, as per copy sent us, printed in one color Red, Blue or Black as desired \$10.00 each 100.  
You have marked "See" in upper left hand corner in Red ink this can be done at an expense of \$1.50 per form extra.  
Very truly yours,  
Calhoun Show Print,

Calhoun Show Print letter to the Goodrich show. Author's collection.

gage ex-canvas wagons-box 4 ft wide 11 ft long 3 ft high Box painted red, black trimming all gears painted white blue striping, Price \$30.00 each.

We would be pleased to answer any questions in regard to outfit or entertain any offer made for all or part. Can be seen any time next 5 or 6 days here in Toledo at 1846 Champlain street.

The next day Mr. Moriarty dropped a note to James Goodrich with some additional information about the wagons: Dear Sir

This outfit is for wagon show-that is what it was used for, wagons & all. Wagons are regular width tired, except one which is 3 inch wider than regular width of wagons. Tires are 2 & 2 in and 3 inch.

These wagons are all steel axal - 1 inch axal- front wheels turn under.

Poles can be taken out.

Double trees - all on good platform springs - well painted.

Price is all right hat I gave you. Yours truly, In Haste

In response to a letter of December 6 from the Goodrich Show the J. C. Goss & Company of Detroit, Michigan on December 8 provided a quote as they were the proprietors of the Detroit Tent and Awning Company, Practical Makers of Show Canvas.

The price of a 90 foot round top with 2-40 ft. middles made of 6-ounce best tent drill would be \$450.00. A 10 ft side wall for the tent would cost \$66.00 making the total \$516.00. The cost of a 30 foot dressing top and 10 foot side wall made of the same material as the big top was quoted at \$42.00. A small sample of the tent material was sent and if desired the company could send a sketch showing the ropes and general makeup of the tents.

A few days later a letter arrived from the T. W. Noble Company of Detroit, Michigan, another producer of tents. In response to the G. H. & S letter of December 10

the quote came back as follows. This was a second letter to the Noble Company as they had quoted for an 8 ounce top, and 6 ounce side wall. But the new request was for a lighter tent. A 90 foot round top with 2 - 40 ft. middles and 10 foot side wall all of 6 1/2 ounce drill was \$400.00. A diagram of half of the round top together with a 40 foot middle piece was included so the buyer could see the way the proposed tent was to be made and roped. An additional horse tent 26 x 48 feet with a 6 foot side wall cost \$56. A Cook tent 18 x 30 feet with an 8 foot side wall cost \$28. Troughs with partitions for the horse tent, made of #5 canvas were priced at \$1.50 per horse.

December 8, 1900 Meeting of the Board of Directors:

Noted that James W. Goodrich and Al G. Southey were authorized to visit Indianapolis and other Western cities, granted with full powers to buy what show property they see fit that in their judgement may be suitable.

On December 11 the sales of stock was showing signs of promise as 20 shares were sold to Wallee Isetts for \$500.00, 10 shares were sold to Henry Feme for \$250.00, and 10 shares were sold to Harrie Moorehouse for \$250.00.

On December 13 Lew Hoffman wrote to Prof. George S. Clark of Medina, New York in response to his



letter. It was noted that "as our buyers are in the west we have written them to stop at your place on their return, which will be in a few days and we would ask for an option until they return as above stated, as we may be able to do business with you." The letter from Clark was forwarded to Goodrich & Southey at Toledo, Ohio with the note that if they do not buy dogs and ponies in the west "here is a chance to have dogs, it is possible when you come home you could come that way and see them".

This was followed by a note to Goodrich & Southey later that same day stating that the Murray Company of Chicago had written regarding a tent. Murray & Company were manufacturers of circus canvases and they noted that they had not received a reply to their last communication. "we write to inquire if you are now ready to place your order and what prospect there is of our getting the work." Hoffman penned the letter in haste noting that he hoped the two representatives would "let me know VisaV. where I can head you off if I need to."

Keeping in touch in 1900 meant telegrams, and believe it or not the United States mails came through on a very reliable schedule. There were a number of timely pieces of correspondence penned between the partners in this pre-telephone age.

From Buffalo New York Al wrote at 4:30 am on December 13 that the two partners had arrived at the station about an hour ago. They were scheduled to leave for Toledo at 8:55 am and would arrive in Toledo at 3:40 pm. The weather was quite warm, although they had come through an area where there were sleighs at the railroad depot. Al was informing Lew that they would be on the lookout for any correspondence, care of General Delivery, before they leave Toledo. At 2:30 pm as the west-bound train was delayed at Cleveland

Al wrote a postcard noting that the Train here 2 hours late, it will be 6 pm when we get to Toledo. The part

ners spent the night at the Boody House in Toledo and Al penned a third letter that was postmarked 10:30 pm that same day:

We arrived here at 6 pm safe & sound. Have an appointment with J. C. Mortariety this evening about one hour. We learnt of some ponies for sale today in St. Clairsville, will try and see them on the way back. They are near Dunkirk, New York. Jim sets near me and sends his regards and of course I do the same including Mrs. H & Roy (Lew's son).

After the meeting with Mortariety, the partners headed west to Indianapolis, Indiana where they

leaving put our offer in writing & mailed it to him with instructions to write us by the next mail here (Indianapolis).

His horse tent & Dining tent are fine ones in fact "New" well we are going to be up early & see what we can do here. We got your letter all OK will try and go back by way of Medina, New York to see the troupe of dogs. We now expect to go from her to Peru in this state to see what Wallace has for sale at his winter quarters. I don't know that I can say any more - Yes I can - go to the stable look over out letters see who it was that wrote from Medina offering some wagons for sale write me the address & mail to Medina, New York General Delivery & I will call when I get there & get it. No snow here weather quite pleasant. I trust this will find you all well as it leaves us. J.W.G. Sends regards.

P.S. just where we will be over Sunday depends

entirely on what occurs tomorrow.

Hold this letter for future reference on account of the Toledo deal.

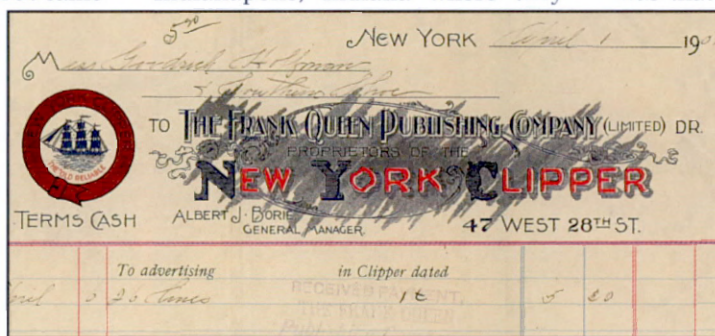
A telegram from Al was sent December 16 from Indianapolis to Lew in Bridgeport noting that Troupe of ponies and dogs would be arriving on Thursday. On the 17th an anxious Lew wrote to the partners:

Your letters, three and one postal came through to hand, also your telegram, I should take it that you either bought the ponies and dogs or that you intend to, I have been expecting a letter from you all day with the information as to what you people did in the matter but have none up to this writing. I of course have noted all you have said as to the Toledo man.... Inclosed you will find the letter of the party you wanted me to send, Pender; you have the letter of the party with the dogs in Medina, New York for I sent it to you in or on to Toledo.

On the same date from Indianapolis Al wrote a letter to Lew:

Just a few words - We bought the troupe of black ponies & troupe of dogs finest high diving dog I ever saw. Also:

1 steel tired pony wagon



Statement from the New York Clipper to the Goodrich show. Author's collection.

arrived at 10:30 on December 14. Al noted the following Toledo business:

We did not make any deal at Toledo found out that there was a mortgage held by another party, the man tried all day up till the time we left there to find the man that held the mortgage but did not seem to be able to. We made him an offer of \$175.00 for the following - 1 Marquette, 1 A Horse tent, 1 Dining Tent, 1 Beacon light, 1 Stringer wagon, 3 Baggage wagons. But he said that he did not believe that the mortgage holder would let him sell a part of it, and the rest of it we would not want.

The mortgage loan was \$450.00 the goods are in storage at \$20.00 per month. So you see that they are eating themselves up quite fast, but the storage has been paid in full to December 13, 1900, so there was no question in that line. Mortariety promised to return at 1 pm but did not do so, and we were there until 2:40 pm and then left, but before



1 rubber tired pony wagon  
1 set double pony harness (new)  
3 sets of single pony harness (new)  
1 saddle & pony & dog properties  
for the sum of \$600.

The ponies are broke to ring work but look rough & shaggy hair very long all of them under 8 years old some 3 & 4.

The ponies & dogs will leave here by Adams Express Wednesday AM at 3 o'clock. Will arrive there Thursday about 11 AM. This is the cheapest way we find-will cost us about \$60.00. Jim will be with them saving his fare home. We paid down \$150.00 on them the balance COD by Adams Express.

There is 2 lions 1 panther for sale in Cincinnati. I am going to see them today.

The *Billboard* advertised For Sale - 2 fine lionesses, a Male Panther, 1 Sun Bear, 1 Male Tiger (Bengal) (seven years old) All in fine condition.

The contact was S. A. Stephan, Supt., Cincinnati Zoological Gardens.

Going to stop at Circleville to see some spotted ponies - try & buy 2 if we can.

I am going to stop at Lancaster & will try to go to Medina if I can but I also want to stop at Columbia Wagon Works at Columbia, Pa.

The property that was purchased was the Royale Dog and Pony Circus - 50 Dogs, Ponies, Monkeys, & Goats - Up-To-Date - Every Animal a Star. The Show's manager was T. A. Leonard, Treasurer Ferd Eberhardt and the equestrian director was Arthur Eberhardt. The permanent address of the show was 122 South Capitol Avenue, Indianapolis, Indiana.

The star of the show was Prince the High Diving Dog, who held a record of diving from the height of 50 feet into a net. His masterful training was shown in the fact that he goes up the ladder unassisted. There was also Flossie, the talking pony that Adds, Subtracts, Tells Time, the Day and the Week.

There was the Only Donkey that draws the color line - an act you must see to appreciate.

Sparkel, the riding goat was another feature.

There was also the McGinty Family and a number of clowns, dogs, leapers, jumpers, runners, boxers, bag punchers, riders, skip rope, dancers, etc.

Included with the letter was an invoice for the item purchased from Ferdinand Eberhardt of Indianapolis, Indiana. The 6 Shetland ponies were named Goldie - Flossie - Tom - Queen - Major - & Bobby. The troupe of dogs were named Prince - Sauk - Joker - Nimble - Shellback - Mickey-Dude - Dandy & Dossie. Among the equipment was a high diving ladder & pad and a pony pad for Queen.

Being on the spot with cash in hand helped to close the deal, for Mr. Eberhardt also had another bidder for the circus property. On November 27 The Bonheur Brothers Famous 20th Century Yellow Wagon Shows penned a letter to him:

Dear Sir:

Have you sold you high dive dog? If not state lowest cash that takes him with net, etc.

State what other dogs and describe ponies and their acts.

From the notations on the letter it appears Mr. Eberhardt was asking \$500 for the lot, and at the same time the representatives of the Goodrich Show purchased it all.

The Bonheur Bros. Show was called the New Golden Allied Show. J. R. Bonheur advertised trained dogs and ponies carefully organized into a children's entertainment, and the show had a special feature. It seems that Mr. Bonheur originated the mechanism for producing animated pictures in 1883, and submitted the details of his idea for the construction of the first moving picture machine to Thomas A. Edison in January, 1886.

So Mr. Bonheur originated the picture machine that was perfected by Thomas A. Edison. On tour with the show was the Great Kinodrome animated picture machine and conjunctional mammoth grand \$500. "Talking Machine."

Mr. Eberhardt also provided a quote for the G.H. & S Show Company for he was one of the owners of Eberhardt & Co at 122 South Capitol Avenue. The firm produced tents, awnings and canvas coverings of all kinds. He was quoting on a 90

foot round top with 2 - 40 foot middle pieces made from 6 \_ ounce drill. The tent was to be roped and banded with the side poles 9 feet 10 inches apart and quarter poles 20 feet apart. The 3 piece side wall was 10 feet high, 160 feet long made of a aa drill, roped top and bottom and ends and furnished with 3/8 inch tie lines - Cost of the top and side wall \$626.00

Also quoted was:

A Dressing Room Top 30 x 60 with a 10 foot side wall at \$73.00

Cook House Top 20 x 40 with a 7 foot wall \$48.00

Horse Top 30 x 60 with a 6 foot wall furnished with 5 mangers 6 horses to a side which would stand 60 horses \$ 162.00

More details of the deal for the horses and ponies come from Al who traveled East with Jim to Richmond, Indiana. They stopped at The Hotel Westcott in Richmond, Indiana and purchased a Shetland pony from J. M. Westcott.

I wrote you from Indianapolis just before we left there telling you what we had done.

We came here - had not been here 1 hour when we bought a black Shetland Gelding, 3 years old for \$35.00, all crated ready to ship. Broken to drive single, He is a little Gem to look at, the ponies in Indianapolis have had no care and look very rough but they have been broken to the ring and that is worth a lot to us.

We have got one of the best high diving dogs in the country and don't you forget it.

Also one of the best front foot dogs - He will walk on his front feet 45 seconds with no trouble at all... The dogs are Irish Setters & Beagle hounds crossed there intelligence is wonderful in my opinion.

The high dive dog did a 40 foot dive Sunday while on his way home he dove 30 feet right off from a bridge in to the water. He does the figure 8 very fast around your legs, sits on chair and holds 1 end of the rope for another dog to skip...

This outfit complete is the one that was advertised in *Clipper* some weeks ago.

Mr. Starrett of Middletown, New York sent a certified check here yesterday for \$100. for the shipment of



the 6 ponies price \$500. balance was to be paid COD by express. But we cut him off and bought the whole for \$600 which we considered dirt cheap. Jim is going back to Indianapolis tomorrow early & I am going to Cincinnati. Jim will leave Indianapolis with the ponies at 3 PM Wednesday morning arriving there about noontime Thursday. The express Company allowed pass for one man to go with ponies, so that saves one fare.. I will go to Lancaster & to the Columbia Wagon Company if it is possible... I tell you it takes time and money to cover all this trip & don't you forget It .

Little is known of Al's trip east other than he made it to Cincinnati and telegraphed

Lew to write the contact in Medina, New York as it was important, but to respond to the Seventh Avenue Hotel in Pittsburg.

On December 20 W. S. Bullard of Elmira, New York purchased 20 shares of stock for \$500.00 thus giving the show some necessary capital that allowed for expansion.

The December 20 ledger noted that the show purchased for cash at Indianapolis 6 ponies, 2 wagons, 1 troupe of nine performing dogs, 5 sets of harness and properties for the dogs at the cost of \$775.00. The expenses for the trip to the west by the two junior members of the Firm, James and Al was totaled at \$163.75. The shipping charges of the stock and material from Indianapolis was \$77.30 and the crating of the dogs and ponies cost \$4.89.

There was also a Shetland pony purchased for \$35.00.

On December 24 there arrived for Jim Goodrich a note from the Sautelle House, Sig. Sautelle, Proprietor at Homer, New York. The letter was from a friend, W. F. Parker (Shanty) and he was advising that:

I had a talk with Mr. Southey when he visited us in Virginia this fall and he told me to write you as you were going to put out a big show next season.

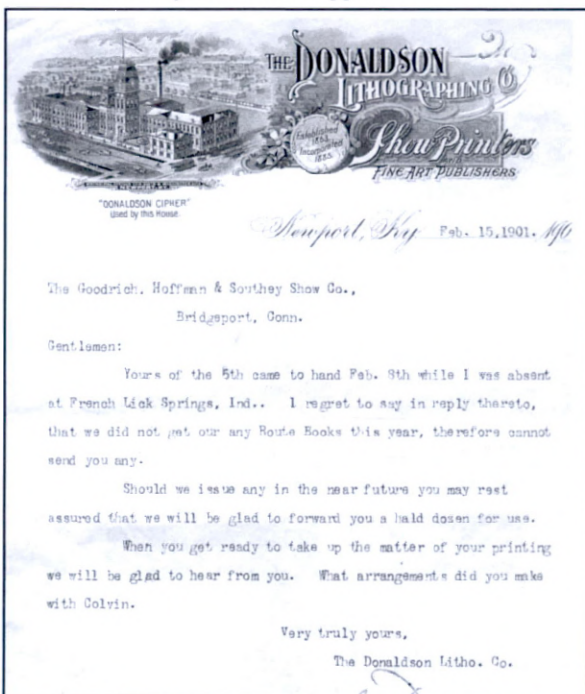
I think you can get it here pretty reasonable as this guy want to sell - that add of his of weeks ago was not

a bluff. W. W. Main sent his animal trainer on here and bought the elephant and animals and Sig says he is going to sell it all if he has to sell it in pieces. He has got a good 100 foot top with 50 foot middle - that were only used three weeks last fall - it is a Kunkley make and waterproof.

He has has got a good lot of stuff still and if you intend buying it would pay you to come and look this stuff over...Hargreaves was over here and told him to hold it till he heard from him, but I don't know as he has done anything yet.

I had a chance to go on and take the Rhoda Royal top for this winter but I did not think I wanted any of it so I did not go on. Let me know how big you are going out and what you are going to put out.

Shanty. care the *Clipper*.



Donaldson letter to the Goodrich show. Author's collection.

January 6, 1901 there was a letter from the showman Sig Sautelle in Homer, New York who wrote in reply to an earlier letter saying:

"I will sell you the property that you name at the following prices visa 5 baggage wagons \$50.00 each, 2 small cages \$100.00 each, organ wagon with organ all complete \$175.00 40 horses \$4,000.00 20 sets of good harness \$300.00 and I have a lot of good wardrobe to sell cheap

Big Top \$600.00 - it cost me more and as you know it is not hurt any - wishing you the very best of success I am yours.

On December 23 there were expenses paid for Al to go to Winchester, New Hampshire and return \$10.46. Al telegraphed Lew on Christmas Eve that he had met a - "Good man - good deal can do business - home nine thirty."

This was in response to a letter from Shipman's Mammoth Uncle Tom's Cabin Company, J. W. Shipman Manager to James Goodrich.. The show boasted 4 years of uninterrupted success - 2 bands - Orchestra - 60 People - 60 Horses - A monster street parade with many features - 2 brass bands - Lady fife and drum corps.

Dear Sir

I am thinking of taking out a circus the coming season & write you to see if you have any idea of enlarging your show. I have 40 head of stock & several wagons all in good condition & suitable for circus business such as Ticket Wagon, open Den Wagon, Float, 2 Tab Wagons, Passenger Wagon, Band Wagon, 5 Baggage Wagons, 12 sets of Heavy Double Harness, 2 - 4 horse pony harnesses, 3 small ponies, 6 small mules, 80 foot round top with 2 - 30 foot middles,.. would be pleased to hear from you if you think of making any changes.

Yours J. W. Shipman Permanent address, Winchester, N. H.

December 26, 1900 Meeting of the Board of Directors:

Noted that directors were to visit Winchester N. H. and Boston to look over show property offered for sale.

On December 27 J. W. Shipman telegraphed James="Don't come tomorrow - letter to follow". This was followed by a December 31 trip to Winchester by Lew and Al, at a cost of \$18.60.

The show's account ledger noted the following expenses:

January 7, 1901 invoice for advertising in the New York *Clipper* for \$11.50

January 7, 1901 payment of 25



cents for revenue stamps.

January 17 invoice for boarding two horses at a stable (strayed from lot) \$1.50

January 21 deposit to T. W. Noble Co. on account for tents under construction \$100.00

January 23 invoice from The Billboard Publishing Co. for advertisement \$4.00.

The *Billboard* on January 14 wrote that they did not receive the ad that the show had mailed the previous week. As it was late it could not make the next edition and the ad was to be placed in the issue for the week of January 14. On January 19, 1901 the want ad appeared in print:

Goodrich, Hoffman and Southey Show Company (Wagon Shows), Seventh Season.

People in all lines of the Circus business for the coming season of 1901. First-Class Contracting Agent, Billposters, Lithographers and Distributors, High Class Acts and Novelties of all kinds for big show, side show and concert; first-class leader for band; musicians of all kinds write: Riders, acrobats, Gymnasts, Aerialists, etc.; ladies for flat and chariot races, for hippodrome; good, sober boss canvas man. boss hostler, chandelier man, property man, working men of all kinds; four and six-horse drivers. Would like to hear from good boss animal man, also want to hear from side show proprietors who wish to furnish side show complete. Address, THE GOODRICH, HOFFMAN & SOUTHEY SHOW CO. P. O. Box 531, Bridgeport, Conn.

The clipping Department at the *Billboard* pulled an ad from the *New York Clipper* and stated that the G.H. & S. Show should advertise in the *Billboard* as "It will pay you and pay you well". This ad would only cost you \$.70 for each insertion. The ad read as follows:

FOR SALE, RENT OR PRESENT-AGE. Complete 20 Wagon Show, everything but draught horses. A rare chance to right party. Those meaning



Another litho used by the Goodrich show. John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Tibbals Digital collection.

business only write. L.W.H. No. 87 Williams Street, Bridgeport, Conn.

A response came from Findley Braden of Philadelphia, Pa. on February 1 regarding this notice in the *New York Clipper*.

Gentlemen:

Yours received - could not answer sooner as I was out of turn. We could add the cages to good advantage with putting a hip on the tent. My plan would be to have them enter the black tent & so on to an annex where the cages could be located. I would accept your 40 % offer providing you allow me to run the glass blowing in the same space as the cages - We to share on same basis as black tent.

Mr. John Jukes I can secure whom you no doubt know of is the very best glass blower in the country. I would carry a fine lay out including feather flowers which would add greatly to our show as an attraction. Understand the glass blowing would be on a strictly square basis. I would like to have the assistant boss canvassman that was with Pawnee Bill Wild West last season. He is sober, quiet etc. and a fine worker. I am not certain that he could be secured. If he could he would be a jewel.

The reason I suggest a little tent on side of back of the black top is that when the big top is closed for show it sometimes is very hot. We generally opened our show as soon as the parade was over & back on the lot

sometimes if crowd came to lot before parade we run in a show & get them out in time for street parade. A big hit can be made among the children by having a show especially for them. All this I know how to work & would push it for all there is in it. If the above is satisfactory let me know & we can arrange agreement.

On February 19 Mr. Braden sent a postcard to the G. H & S Show Company noting that:

The contract has not arrived yet. The Black Tent is at Pawnee Bills Headquarters & will have it shipped to Bridgeport without poles as Dan Taylor. I can purchase them cheaper than paying freight on

Them. Do you open in Bridgeport?

I was over to Welsh Bros last week & think they made good money.

They use a 3 car show. The outlook for this season it seems to me is good. Pawnee Bill thinks so as he is enlarging his show. Dan Taylor tells me he is going to add several cars.

Erasmus Darwin Colvin wrote to James Goodrich on the last day of January 1901 on a letterhead that noted Colvin was the American Representative of Carl Hagenbeck's menagerie and park in Hamburg, Germany, and his office was in Chicago, Illinois.

On my recent trip to Cincinnati I was with Mr. Donaldson and had quite a talk with him about you, and I understand you are the Zano that was with me, About 10 years ago. Of course I did not know who I was corresponding with until now. James Goodrich once did an act by the name of Signor James where he did a slack wire act that "will make you laugh while his scientific balances on the chair and perch pole, placed upon the tight wire are truly wonderful!

As a duo the Zano's-who copied from no one, were the World's Greatest Aereol Pattico on the Movilis ladder perch. His partner Mlle. Bella not only performed a



descent on the single web but was also a lady principal bare-back act while Signor James did a hurdle act.)

Colvin continued stating: "Mr. Donaldson tells me that you want to rent an elephant with the priviledging of purchasing it. I will be in New York on February 6 to meet a consignment of animals and will be there all the week, stopping at the Sturtevant House. If you think it adviseable to meet me there, do so, as we can talk much better than we can write."

The G.H. & S. Show was advertising in a number of venues. The Evening Sentinel of South Norwalk, Conn was to run the following ad three times.

FOR SALE, Circus Stock, 100 Shares of Goodrich Shows (Wagon Shows)

Organized under Connecticut Laws. One or more at par \$25.00 per share, past season cleared more than 40%.

Address at Once

The Goodrich, Hoffman & Southey Show company, Box 551 Bridgeport, Conn.

The show's ledger book also noted the following expenses:

January 31, bought for cash 1 cage at Springfield \$45.00

January 31, paid storage rent at Springfield \$4.00

January 31, paid part of the

expenses at Springfield \$11.00

Feb. 4, Freight from Springfield, Mass \$44.00

Feb. 11 - Expenses to N. Y. to see about buying an elephant \$6.60

March 2, 1901 Meeting of the Board of Directors:

Noted that the Company purchase the show property of J. W. Shipman's Uncle Toms Cabin Company of Winchester, N. H. for the sum of \$2,800. - \$1,000 in cash and the balance \$1,800. in four notes payable June 1, July 1, Aug 1 and Sept. 1. The first 3 for \$500. each and the last one for \$300. It was noted that Al Southey was to act as duly authorized agent for the company on the above deal.

March 13, 1901 Meeting of the Board of Directors:

A. G. Southey reported that he had closed the deal with J. W. Shipman just as instructed at the last meeting, and that all the property was now in the company's possession at winterquarters.

The Account ledger noted paying the following invoices:

March 13 - Freight 2 cars - horses \$72.00

March 14 - Freight 4 cars - wagons \$144.00.

March 14 - O. H. Ellis on account \$1,000.00- Total due was \$2,900.00 to O. H. Ellis

March 16 Calhoun Printing

Company \$100.00

March 16 - Donaldson Printing Company \$50.00

April 1 - New York Clipper \$5.20

April 6 - New Hampshire RR - freight tent from Brattleboro \$5.80

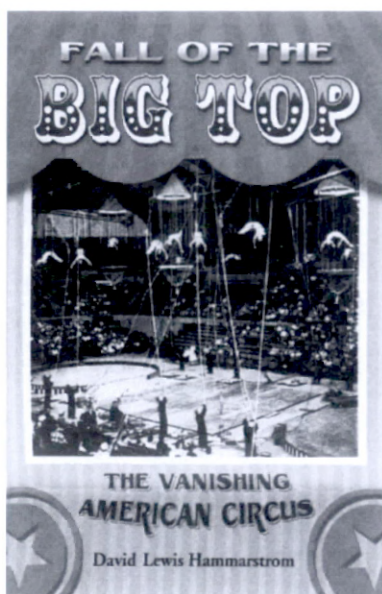
April 20 - Draft Canvas - Nobles \$360.00

April 22 - Freight canvas \$20.44

The Goodrich, Hoffman & Southey Shows opened their 1901 season in Bridgeport, Conn., April 25 to the capacity of the canvas. While the show has encountered plenty of rainy weather, the business has been such that it will leave a considerable amount on the right side of the ledger....A review in the New York *Clipper* noted that "The show is new from marquee to dressing room, carries 90 people, has seventy head of stock and ten cages of animals....Manager Goodrich is introducing his trained ponies and dogs to good results."

In this case the Goodrich Hoffman & South Show was able to incorporate in the State of Connecticut and began the season with new equipment, acts and a novel way to finance the deal - selling stock in a circus to the public.

References: Account books, ledger book, correspondence, from Goodrich, Hoffman & Southey Archives in authors collection & The *New York Clipper*.



## For treasured *Fall of the Big Top* interviews with...

Michel Barette, Bunni Bartok, Paul Binder, Barbara Byrd, Alex Chimal, Michael Christensen, Norma Cristiani, Raffaele De Ritis, Ken Dodd, Calvin DuPre, Hank Ernest, Tito Gaona, Tommy Hanneford, Geoff Hoyle, James Judkins, Sherwood Kaiser, Andrey Kovgar, Chris Lashua, Dale Longmire, Robert Mitchell, Picasso, Jr., Bob Moore, John Pugh, Paul Pugh, Larry Pisoni, David Rawls, James Royal, Svetlana Shamsheeva, William Taggart, Slava Troyan, Vallery, Sylvia Zerbini.

Warmest Thanks, Spangeland!

David Lewis Hammarstrom



# BANDWAGON

## THE JOURNAL OF THE CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

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FRED D. PFENING, JR.

Fred D. Pfening III, Managing Editor

JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2008

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CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC. <http://circushistory.org>. Robert F. Sabia, President, 3100 Parkside La., Williamsburg, VA 23185. Judith Griffin, Vice President, 519 N. Union St., Appleton, WI 54911-5031. Alan Campbell, Secretary-Treasurer, 600 Kings Peak Dr., Alpharetta, GA 30022-7844.

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### THE FRONT COVER

Big riding acts such as the Cristianis, Loyal Repenskys, Hodginis and Hannefords are long gone from the American circus, but the Riding Richters are alive and well in Europe. Florian Richter's act won a Gold Clown award at the 2008 Monte Carlo International Circus. The troupe included ten men, one woman and six horses. The finale of the act had seven men on one horse.

This photo from Raffaele de Ritis was taken at the 2008 Monte Carlo Circus. Photo courtesy of Buckles Woodcock Blog.

### 2008 CHS CONVENTION

CHS President Robert Sabia has announced that the 2008 Circus Historical Society convention will be held in West Springfield, Massachusetts, September 21-24. The feature of the meeting will be a full day spent at the Eastern States Exposition, on September 23, to see the Big E Super Circus produced by Struppi Hanneford.

Papers will be presented on September 22 and 23. The auction

will be held on the evening of September 22 and the banquet will be held the evening of September 23. The guest speaker will be Wayne McCary, CEO and President of the Big E.

The registration fee is \$140.

The convention hotel is the Clarion Hotel and Conference Center, 1080 Riverside Street, W. Springfield, MA 01089, located off Inter-state 91 and the Massachusetts Turnpike, two miles from the Big E fairgrounds.

### BANDWAGON BACK ISSUES

1966 Jan.-Feb.  
1967-Nov.-Dec.  
1968-All but Jan.-Feb.  
1969-July-Aug., Sept.-Oct.  
1970-All but July-Aug., Sept.-Oct.  
1971-All but Mar.-Ap., May-June.  
1972-All available.  
1973-All but Nov.-Dec.  
1974-All but Mar.-Ap., May-June.  
1975-All available.  
1976-All but Jan.-Feb., Nov.-Dec.  
1977-All but Mar.-Ap.  
1978-All available.  
1979-All but Jan.-Feb.  
1980-1986-All available.  
1987-All but Nov.-Dec.  
1988-2007-All available.

In addition to above many other issues are available going back to the 1960s. If you are in need of early issues write to the Editor.

Price is \$4.00 each. Add \$2.50 postage for one issue, \$5.00 for more than one issue. Please select substitutes in case we are out of any of above.

### BANDWAGON BACK ISSUES

2515 DORSET RD.  
COLUMBUS, OH 43221

Room reservations can be made at 413-781-8750. Please mention the CHS to receive special room rates.

A convention registration form with full details will be sent in the March-April *Bandwagon*.

### NEW MEMBERS

Mike Straka 4485  
1234 Pine Ridge  
Bushkill, PA 18324-9794

### REINSTATED MEMBER

Robert J. Goldsack 790  
70 Fublin Ave.  
Nashua, NH 03063-3046

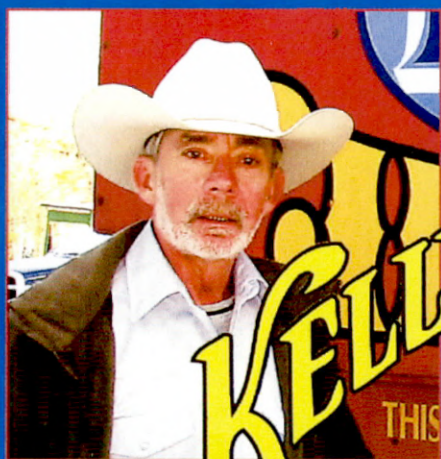
### PLAN TO ATTEND

### The 2008 CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY CONVENTION

SEPTEMBER 21-24

WEST SPRINGFIELD. MASSACHUSETTS





The

# KELLY MILLER Circus



and the North and Royal Families wish  
*Bandwagon* and The Circus Historical Society

**A happy and prosperous new year**



*Nina, Libby and Viola, too.*